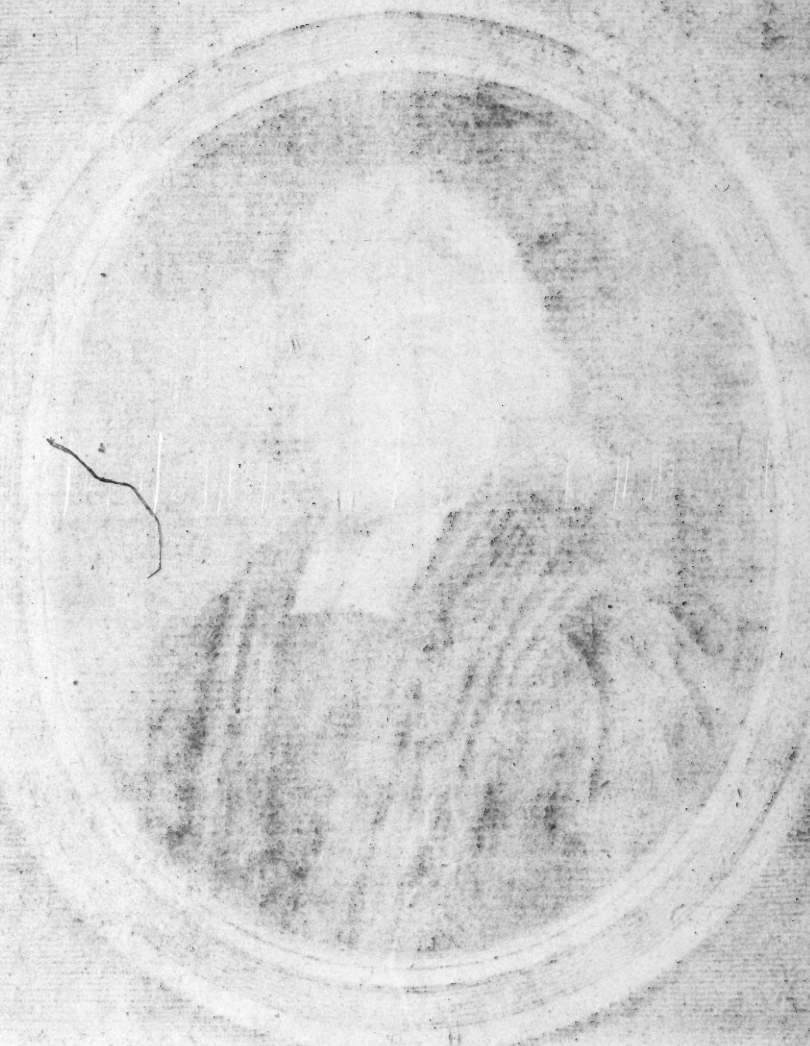

Dr. *BLACKALL*'s
S E R M O N S.

Dr. BLACKALL'S
SERIALS





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J. Short sculp.

Ofspring Blackall, D.D.

FOURTEEN
SERMONS

PREACH'D upon
Several Occasions.

By OFSPRING BLACKALL, D. D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to Her
MAJESTY.

The Second Edition.

L O N D O N:

Printed by J. Leake, for Walter Kettilby,
at the Bishop's Head in St. Paul's Church-
Yard. MDCCVI.

FOURTEEN

SERMONS

PREACHED

SEVERAL OCCASIONS

OF THE
CHURCH OF
ENGLAND



1811

OF THE

LONDON

Printed by J. Jackson, for William Mavor,
at the Bishop's Head in St. Paul's Church-
yard. MDCCLVI.

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EIGHT

EIGHT
SERMONS,

Preach'd in the *Cathedral-Church*
of *St. Paul, London,*

At the *Lecture* founded by the
Honourable ROBERT BOYLE, Esq;
In the Year MDCC.

EIGHT

SERMONS

Preached in the Cathedral of Winchester
of Salisbury



At the request of the

Honourable Robert Boyle, Esq.

In the Year MDC.

To the most Reverend Father in God,

T H O M A S

Ld. Arch-Bishop of Canterbury;

Sir HENRY ASHURST, Baronet;

Sir JOHN ROTHERAM, Serj. at Law;

JOHN EVELYN Senior, Esquire;

Trustees appointed by the Will of the Honourable ROBERT BOYLE, Esquire.

Most Reverend and Honoured,

I Beg Leave humbly to present
to you these First-fruits of
my Labours in that Station
which you have been pleased to
assign me for this Year; Taking
this Occasion both to acknowledge
publickly, and with all Thankful-
ness the Honour you have done
me in appointing me to this Work;
and likewise to give you Assu-
rance that the After-fruits shall
also in due Time be offered to
you, if God shall be pleased to
give

The Epistle Dedicatory.

*give them a Season to ripen ;
And I heartily wish they may be
better and more worth your Ac-
ceptance than , I am sensible,
these are.*

*However , I hope the same
Goodness and kind Opinion of
me which moved you to nominate
me to the Employment will incline
you to forgive all my Failings in
the Management of it.*

*And if my Labours shall be well
accepted by you ; And especially,
If by the Blessing of GOD, (who
only giveth the Increase) they
shall any Ways contribute toward
the Promoting the pious Design
of the Honourable Founder of
these Lectures, of blessed Memo-
ry, I shall be very easie under
the too just Charge of Insuffici-
ency for such an Undertaking,
which I make no Doubt will be
cast upon me by those who will
be inwardly glad that I have
per-*

The Epistle Dedicatory.

performed my Task no better,
and will earnestly wish that the
Christian Cause may never have
an abler Advocate.

But that by your wise Choice of
Persons to succeed in this Em-
ployment, they may see them-
selves every Year disappointed in
this their Wish, is the hearty De-
sire of,

Most Reverend and Honoured,

Your most obliged

Feb. 26. 1699.

and obedient Servant,

OF SP. BLACKALL.

 Note, This EPISTLE DEDICATORY was
Printed with the First of the following *Lectures* when it
was Publish'd singly.

ERRATA.

PAGE 12. Line 27. *d. was.* p. 24. l. 26.
r. *it will.* p. 54. l. 23. for *thinks* r. *things.*
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Serm.

I.

The Sufficiency of a Standing Revelation.

THE First SERMON,

Preach'd *January 1st 1699.*

St. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses
and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one
went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses
and the Prophets, neither will they be per-
swaded, though one rose from the dead.*

TH E S E Words contain some of the
Discourse that passed between *Abra-
ham* in Heaven, and a certain rich
Man in Hell; occasion'd by a Request
which he had made in the foregoing Verses, in
the behalf of his *five Brethren* whom he had left
alive upon Earth; that *Abraham* would be so
kind as to send *Lazarus* to them, to testify to
them, lest they also should come into that place of tor-
ment.

Serm. *ment.* And the general Design of them, and indeed of the whole Parable of which they are a Part, is to assert the *Sufficiency* of those Means which G O D hath thought fit to use to bring Men to Repentance, particularly by granting them a *standing Revelation* of his Will; and the probable Unsuccessfulness of any other Method that we could propose, and perhaps might think more proper for this Purpose.

I.

And when these Words were first spoken, it was with a special Reference to the State of the *Jews*, and to that Light, and those Means of Salvation which were afforded to them, at the Time when *our Saviour* began his Preaching; when all the *standing Revelation* of G O D's Will, was contained in the Books of *Moses*, and in the Writings of the *Prophets*.

But since then our Lord *Jesus Christ*, the eternal Son of G O D, a more credible Messenger than *Lazarus* from the dead, has come himself in Person to assure us that there is a Heaven and a Hell, and to shew us the means of attaining that, and avoiding this; and G O D having raised him up from the dead, after he had been Crucified by the *Jews*, has given *sufficient* Assurance to the World of his divine Mission; And that *Jesus* did and said such things, and that he died and rose again, we have the Testimony of his *Apostles*, and others, who were Eye and Ear-witnesses thereof, and who in Confirmation of their Testimony were empowered by G O D to do as great Miracles as *Jesus* himself had done; And lastly, of what was done and taught by *our Saviour* and his *Apostles*, we have very credible Records still remaining, *viz.* the Books of the *New Testament*; the Authority of which

is

is at least as well Proved to us, as ever the Authority of the *Old Testament* was to the *Jews*: So that we now have plainly more and stronger Motives to Repentance, than the *Jews* before our *Saviour's* Time had; we consequently do stand in less need of *new Miracles and new Revelations* than they did; And therefore the Argument in the Text, as it may be applied to us who live now, is much stronger than as it was here urged by *Abraham* with Reference to the *Jews*, while they had only *Moses* and the *Prophets*.

Serm.

I.

And thus in my Discourse upon the Words, I shall now consider it, *viz.* as if the Request made by the *rich Man* in the Behalf of his Brethren, in the two foregoing Verses, were made now in the Behalf of those to whom the Revelation of the *Gospel* has been given, but without Success; and as if the Answer here returned to it by *Abraham*, had been suited to the present State of things.

And from the Words, thus largely understood, I shall take occasion to speak to these Three Points.

I. I shall endeavour to shew that the present *standing Revelation* of *God's* Will, contained in the *Books* of the *Old* and *New Testament* is abundantly *sufficient* to perswade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets*, (I add, they have also *Christ*, and his *Apostles*;) *let them hear them*.

II. I shall shew that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, it is an *unreasonable Request* to de-

Serm. fire more. *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

I.



And,

III. Lastly, I shall endeavour to shew, That in case GOD should condescend to gratifie Men in this unreasonable Desire (working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the dead, to assure them of a Future State, and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis *highly probable* that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance by the Preaching and *standing Revelation* of the Gospel, would be perswaded by this Means. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets (nor Christ and his Apostles) neither will they be perswaded, though one rose from the dead.*

I. I shall endeavour to shew that the present *standing Revelation* of GOD's Will, contained in the Books of the Old and New Testament is abundantly *sufficient* to perswade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets, (Christ and his Apostles) let them hear them.*

And, I think, that if the *standing Revelation* which GOD hath made of his Will in the *Holy Scriptures*, can upon any account be thought *insufficient* to effect this Design, it must be upon one of these two Accounts; viz. Either, 1. Because no *standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for this Purpose; Or, 2. Because there are some particular *Defects* in that *standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scripture*, which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose

pose as 'tis possible a *standing Revelation* might be. Serm. I.

1. It may be pretended that no *standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for this Purpose. I am now therefore to enquire with what Reason this can be pretended.

And in speaking to this Point, it does not lie upon me to prove that GOD could not reveal his Mind afresh to every Man in every Age of the World, if he so pleased; for there is no question but that the same GOD who in *divers manners spake in times past to our Fathers by the Prophets*, could, if he pleased, speak to every one of us their Children, in such Manner as he then spake to the *Prophets* themselves; so that we might be all immediately *tought of GOD* as they were. But every thing that may be done is not expedient to be done; and whether this Method would be expedient or not, will be hereafter enquired. Serm. vii.

Neither does it now lie upon me to prove, that this Way which GOD hath thought fit to take to instruct the greatest Part of the World, *viz. by a standing Revelation*, is the best Way, and the most like to be effectual of any that could be used. Of this I shall likewise have Occasion to speak somewhat hereafter. Serm. viii.

But what lies upon me at present to make good, is only this, That a *standing Revelation* of GOD's Will may be so well contrived and so well attested as to be *sufficient* to perswade Men.

And if there be any Ground for the contrary Pretence, I think it must be either, 1. Because all Matters necessary to be known and

Serm. done by Men at all Times, cannot *at once* be committed to *Writing*: Or, 2. Because there cannot be *sufficient Evidence* given to satisfy a Rational Man, that any Writing that is said to be of divine Inspiration and Authority, is indeed so.

I.

1. It may be said, That all Matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all Times, cannot be *at once* committed to *Writing*: Because every Age of the World produces new Opinions, which whether they be erroneous or not, cannot be judged by a *Criterion* that was given many Ages before these Opinions were broached: And as the World grows older in Years, it likewise improves in Wickedness, which cannot be restrained and suppressed by an old Law which was made before several Instances of those Wickednesses that are now practised were either known or thought of. And if it were not so, what need would there be of such a number of Books as are written in every Age to direct Men how to distinguish between Truth and Error, and what Opinions to fix upon in that great Variety of Opinions that are offered to them? Or what need would there be of so many new Laws as are daily made in every Commonwealth to restrain the growing Extravagancies of Mankind, and to keep them within due Bounds? So that if there be any Necessity at all of divine Revelation to teach Men the Belief of Truth and the Practice of Righteousness, it is necessary that there should be a new and fresh Revelation made, at least as often as any new Error is broached, or any new Piece of Villany is practised in the World.

But

But to this Objection against the *Sufficiency* of a *Standing Revelation*, I suppose a full Answer will be given in these two particulars.

Serm.
I.

(1.) That there is no Arguing from the Wisdom and Power of Men, to the Wisdom and Power of GOD. It may be granted to be impossible for a *Man* to write such a Book as shall be *sufficient* to confute all the Errors that can possibly at any time afterwards spring up; Or to compile such a Body of Laws as shall be *sufficient* to prevent or punish all future Crimes; But what is impossible with Men, may be possible with GOD; who has a perfect Foresight of all the Errors that will ever be broached, and of all the Wickedness that will ever be practised by Men to the End of the World. To a Being of infinite Wisdom and Knowledge it may be not only possible, but very easie so to contrive a Revelation, designed by him for the Direction of future Ages, that no Addition shall ever after need to be made to it. Nay indeed,

(2.) The Thing it self, that is, That a *standing Revelation* should be thus perfect; that it should be so contrived at once, and at first, as to be *sufficient* to answer all the Ends of a divine Revelation as long as the World shall last, is not very hard to be conceived.

For tho' Error be infinite, Truth, at least all Truth necessary to be believed, is finite and limited; And after a divine Relation is once given, no more is necessary to be believed in after Ages than was at first; nor will there ever be more things necessary to be believed to the End of the World, unless GOD shall please to add some new Revelation to the former. And this Revelation of all necessary

Serm. Truth once made, being given to Men that are

I.



endued with Reason, nothing more is, or ever will be needful for the Discovery and Confutation of all Errors that can possibly spring up in after Ages, but only a right Understanding of the Truths already delivered, and a right Use of Reason in making Inferences, and drawing Consequences therefrom. And this is all that is pretended to by the Books of Controversie that are written in every Age: The Design of them is not to declare new Truths, or to establish new Articles of Faith, but only to shew that those Opinions which they represent as false and erroneous, are either in themselves, or in their true Consequences, contrary to some Maxim^s that are already receiv'd as true.

And it is no less easie to conceive that a *standing Revelation* may be at once so contrived as to be for ever *sufficient* to direct Men in all Points of *Practice*: Because although 'tis possible that every Age may afford new Instances of Wickedness, yet the Law that they are all Transgressions of, may be but *one*. And the Rule once given is a perpetual Direction, not only what to do, but likewise what to avoid; and this, as well in those Instances of Wickedness which may be invented afterwards, as in those which were in Practice before the Rule was made. For he that giving Direction to a Traveller in his Way, bids him *keep strait forward*, shall not need (if he speaks to a Man of Reason) to tell him, over and above, that he must be careful to avoid all Turnings to the right hand or to the left; and much less shall he need to give him a particular Account of every Turning that he is to avoid. And tho' in Time to
come

Serm.

I.

come there should be more Bye-ways and Turnings out of the Road than there are at present, yet the same one Direction, *to keep strait forward*, will be as full and as sufficient a Direction then, as it is now.

And the Necessity that Humane Law-givers find themselves under to be every Day repealing former Laws and adding new Ones, is not caused by an absolute Impossibility of making at once such a Body of Laws as might be *sufficient* for all after-times; but arises (as I suppose) Partly from the *Nature of Humane Laws*, which are, for the most part, *Negative* and *Prohibitive* only; and by such a Law nothing is rendred unlawful but what is named; and to name at once every thing that is then, or may be in all after-Ages needful to be prohibited, would indeed be a Work of very great Difficulty; Partly, from the *Nature* of that *Obedience* that is due to a meer Humane Law, which is only an *external* Obedience, and to the *Letter* of the Law; and that indeed must needs be a Law, or a Body of Laws of a prodigious Bulk, and very difficult to be contrived at once, which in the *Letter* thereof shall comprehend and give Direction concerning every Action, and every Mode of Action that are necessary to be done or forborn, in order to the preserving Justice and Peace among Men; Partly, from the *little Regard* that Men generally have to the good of *Posterity*, which makes them only careful to contrive such Orders and Constitutions, as they hope will suffice to preserve Peace in their own time, leaving it to those that come after, to take the like Care for themselves in their Times; Partly, from the *Weakness* and *Ignorance*

Serm. *rance* of the wisest of Men, who not understanding exactly the Tempers of all their Subjects, cannot know certainly what *Effect* their Laws will have, till after they have been for some time experienced; And partly, from the unexpected *Difficulty* that is sometimes met with in the *Execution* of a Law, which may make it necessary afterwards to enforce it with a greater Penalty, or to take some further Care than at first was thought needful to see it executed.

I. But none of these Reasons of the Necessity of new Laws among Men are of any force to shew that it is also necessary that GOD should be every Day making new Declarations of his Will, and that no *Standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for all Times; For the *Laws* of GOD are *positive* and *commanding*, enjoining the truest and heartiest Love both to GOD and Men, and every natural and proper Expression thereof, and by consequence prohibiting every Affection of Mind, and every outward Act that is contrary thereto, whether it be expressly named or not; And the *Obedience* that we owe to a divine Law, is the Obedience of the *Heart* and of the whole inner Man, such as looks beyond the Letter to the *Design* and *Intention* of the Law, and avoids as carefully whatsoever is contrary to the Reason of the Law, as if it had been forbidden in the most express Words: And GOD being KING *for ever and ever*, has the same Relation to all Men in *all Ages*, and cannot but be supposed to design the good Government of his Subjects in after, as well as in former Times; And HE also, *understanding* fully the Tempers of all his Subjects, *knows* beforehand what *Effect*

Serm.

I.

felt the Laws he gives them will have, and can never be disappointed in his Expectation; and so can never be obliged to repeal or alter any of his Laws, by an un-foreseen Experience, that they are not so convenient, or so effectual as he thought they would be; And lastly, He, having all *Power* in his Hands, and a *sovereign* and *uncontroulable Dominion* over all, can appoint what Penalty he pleases to the Transgression of his Laws; can at any time convict Transgressors by his own unerring Knowledge only, and the Testimony of their guilty Consciences, without other Witnesses; and has it in his own single Power, without any Help of others, to execute, whenever he will, whatever Penalty he threatens.

Thus, I think, it appears that a *standing Revelation* may be so well contrived, as to be *sufficient* for all Times; that all Matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all Times may be at once committed to Writing.

2. But Secondly, Tho' this be granted, it may be still further objected against the *Sufficiency* of a *Standing Revelation*, that it can hardly be *sufficiently attested*; that there cannot be *sufficient Evidence* given to satisfy a Rational Man, that any such Writing, which is said to be of divine Inspiration and Authority, is indeed so; And that, (1.) Because there is no Way, but *Eye-witness*, to be *sufficiently assured* that any *Book* was written by the Person who is said to be the *Author* of it; (2.) Because there is *no Way* to be *sufficiently assured*, that the *Author* of such a *Book* did not design to *impose* upon his Readers; And (3.) Because no Man can be *sure*, that he himself was not *deceived* in his Opinion of his own Inspiration, or of a Revelation made to

Serm. to him; or in the Truth of any other Matter
I. which he has related as of his own Knowledge.

(1.) It may be said, that there is no Way but *Eye-witness* to be *sufficiently assured* that any *Book* was written by the Person that is said to be the *Author* of it.

But that's very strange, that there should be no other Way to be *sufficiently assured* of the *Author* of any *Book*, and yet that there are a great many Books in the World, ancient as well as modern, the Authors whereof were never in the least doubted of; who yet, I suppose, did not use to call together a Company of Men to stand by, and see them write those Books which they intended to Publish.

It seems then, that either there may be, besides *Eye-witness*, *sufficient Reason* to believe that a Book was written by the Person under whose Name it goes; or else that all the World has been extremely credulous in receiving an infinite Number of Books as written by such and such Authors, without *sufficient Assurance* thereof. But I believe the Truth is, There are some Men who for Reasons best known to themselves, (but which may, some of them, be easily enough guessed at) will not allow that to be *sufficient Evidence* that a Book was written by a *Prophet* or an *Apostle*, which they must and do allow to be *sufficient Evidence* in any other Case of the like Nature.

For in other Cases we make no Doubt to receive a Book as written by such an Author, if he *owns* himself to be the Author of it; or if it be shewn written with his *own Hand*; or if they that are the *Publishers* of it, declare that they had it from him, as his own; or that they transcribed

scribed or printed it from a *Copy* which they knew to be of his *Hand-writing*; or if it passes current in common *Fame* and *Report* to be his, and his most intimate *Friends* believe it so, and he *himself* does not disown it, and there be none else that pretend any *Claim* or *Title* to it. Where these or most of these Circumstances do concur, we never doubt but that the Person said to be the Author of such a Book, is so indeed; unless there be some very clear Reason, grounded upon the known *Incapacity* of the Person to write in such a Language, in such a Stile, concerning such a Subject, or the like, whereby it may be demonstrated, that (whoever was) he could not be the Author of it. The Truth is, Now a-days, (and I suppose the Case was much the same formerly) whoever is the true Author of any Book, finds very little Difficulty to make Men believe that the Book is his; the greatest Difficulty is for a Man to conceal himself, in case he be not willing to be known to be the Author of it.

And when once a Book is generally receiv'd as written by such a Person, (when, I say, 'tis thus receiv'd) in that Age in which it was first publish'd, and by those that were in the best Capacity to inquire and to judge who was the true Author of it; they that live in after-times never think it reasonable to question the Authority thereof, unless there be, evidently, something, either in the Language, Dialect or Stile; or else in the Matter of the Book, as in the Relation of some Piece of History, the References to some ancient Customs, the Citations out of other Authors, or the like; by which it may be clearly made out that the Book cannot be of such Antiquity as it pretends to, or could

Serm.

I.

Serm. could not be the Writing of that Person who
 I. is reported and has been commonly taken to be
 the Author of it.

Upon such Reasons as these, a great many Books are every Day received as written by such and such Authors; and tho' we cannot be so sure of a thing that we believe upon these Inducements, as we are of what we see with our own Eyes; yet such Reasons as these are by the general Consent of Mankind judged to be *sufficient* in a Matter of this Nature, which is hardly capable of better Proof. And for a Man to disallow in one Case that same Evidence of the Truth of a Matter of Fact, which in other Cases of the like kind he allows to be *sufficient*; for a Man to receive a Book as written by another Person, and not to receive a Book as written by a *Prophet* or an *Apostle*, when he has as much Reason to receive one as the other, and no more Reason to reject one than the other, is not Judgment, or Discretion, or reasonable Caution, but manifest Prejudice and Partiality. But,

(2.) It was further said, That tho' we might be well enough assured that a Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; there is *no Way* to be *sufficiently assured* that he who was the Author of it did not design to *impose upon his Readers*.

It seems then, there is *no Way* to be *sufficiently satisfied* that any Man is an *honest* Man, and fit to be credited; that he does not lye in every thing he says, and intend a Cheat in every thing he does. For if a Man may be believed in what he says, he may as well be believed in what he writes; And if he may be trusted in one Concern, he may be as safely trusted

trusted in another, unless good Reason can be
shewed to the contrary. Serm.
I.

But in judging of humane Nature in general, Men commonly judge of others by themselves: What they are inclined to, they think is the Inclination of Mankind; what they allow themselves in, they think others, (whatever they may pretend) make as little scruple of as they do; what they freely practise, they make no Doubt other Men would practise as freely, on the same Occasions, and upon the same Inducements; So that when any Man is so very suspicious of the Honesty and Veracity of other Men, it gives but too just Ground to think that the Reason of his Aptness to distrust all others, is his Consciousness of his own evil Designs, and of the little Regard that he himself has to Truth in his own Assertions. And if those he has to deal with should refuse to give any Credit to any thing that he affirms, because, according to his own declared Opinion, very little Credit can reasonably be given to the Report and Affirmation of others, I do not see with what Reason he can blame them for so doing.

Not but that, after all, 'tis possible that a Man may, ('tis doubtless what has been done by some) give out a Report, or Write a Book on purpose to deceive Mankind; But nevertheless, I say, that it ought not without very good Reason to be suspected that this is any Man's Design; and that we may have Assurance enough that a thing is not, which yet we must grant was possible to have been. — Particularly as to the Matter we are now speaking of.

First; In case the Author of any Book, or of any Report relates a *Matter of Fact*, of which there

Serm.

I.

there are not, nor well could be, any other Witnesses but *himself*; as if he says that *he* has received from G O D such a Revelation, with order to publish it to the World, or that *he himself* was an Eye or Ear-witness that such a thing was privately done or spoken by another; the *Credibility* of such a Report, whether written or spoken, depends, partly, upon the *Nature* of the Report it self; Partly, upon the *Credit* of it's *Author*; And partly, upon the *Proofs* that he gives of his *Honesty* and *Veracity* in that particular. And where there is a full Concurrence of all these, that is, When the Matter of the Report is credible in it self; when its Author is a Person of Credit; and when he gives the best Proofs that can be of his Veracity in that particular; there is no Reason to reject his Testimony, there is *sufficient Reason* to give Credit to it.

1. If the *Matter* of his Report be credible in it self. And if what he reports be, that he himself has receiv'd such a Revelation from G O D, with order to publish it to the World, I say, that this Report in the general is a credible Report; because it is very agreeable to the *Goodness* of G O D, and therefore not unlikely, that he should impart to Men, by a special Revelation, such things as are very useful for them to know, and which could not be known, or not so well, not so fully, clearly and certainly any other Way as by Revelation; and 'tis certainly not *incredible*, that H E that has given us a Tongue to utter Words, and Skill to express thereby our Thoughts to one another, should have *Power* and *Means* to reveal and express his own Mind in such a Manner, that a Man may understand his Meaning; and 'tis likewise

wife certainly not *incredible* in it self, that GOD, Serm. I.
 intending to declare his Will to Mankind, should make Use of the *Ministry* of a *Man* for this Purpose, and having made known his Will to one Man, give him Commission to communicate the same to others.

If therefore there be any thing incredible in the Report of a divine Revelation, it must be in the *special Matter* of it. But altho' the particular Matter of any such divine Revelation be such a thing as we could never have found out by natural Reason; I say it is nevertheless *credible* as a Matter *divinely revealed*; if it implies no *Contradiction*; if it be not contrary to *natural Reason*; if it be not *repugnant* to a *former divine Revelation* that is well attested; and if it be a *Doctrine worthy of GOD*; that is, If in its true Consequences it has no Tendency to encourage Sin; but on the contrary, has a plain Tendency to promote the Practice of Piety, and Virtue among Men. Against such a Revelation as this there can be no just Objection made from the *Matter* of it: There is no Improbability that such a Thing as this should be the Subject of a divine Revelation.

Or if what he reports be, that *he himself* was by when such a thing was privately done or spoken by another; In this case the *Matter* of his Report is *credible* in it self, if what he says he was an Eye or Ear-witness of, be a proper *Object* of those *Senses*; if it be not an *impossible* thing; if it does not imply a *Contradiction*. And in this case, the *Difficulty*, the *Strangeness*, the *Uncommonness* of the Thing; its being a Thing that was *never known* to be done or said before, or which no Account can

Serm. be given of by *Reason*, or *natural Causes*, is no
 I. just Exception to the Truth of it. There is
 nothing in this kind absolutely incredible but
 what is plainly impossible. But,

2. The *Credibility* of any *Report*, (supposing the Matter of it to be credible) depends, in good Measure, upon the *Credit* of its *Author*.

And then a Man may reasonably be thought an *Author*, or a *Witness* of good *Credit*, in *Matters* of his own *Knowledge*, when he appears, and by all his other Words and Actions shews himself to be, *grave*, *sober*, *considerate*, and in his right *Wits*; when he is a Person of *unblemished Reputation*; when he was never known to *lye*, or *feign*, or *deceive* in other Cases; when he gives no just *Ground* to suspect that he is an *intriguing* or *designing Person*; And And lastly, when he himself is no *Party* to the *Cause*, has no worldly *Interest* carrying on in it, no *Design* of *Honour* or *Profit*, or other temporal *Advantage*, that, to appearance, can be served by his giving such *Testimony*; when he will be neither the better if his *Report* be credited, nor the worse, if it be not believed. Such a *Witness* as this cannot reasonably be excepted against. But,

3. Even such a *Report* made by such a *Person*, is still further *credible*, in case he gives also the best *Proofs* that can be given, or that the *Case* will bear, of his *Veracity* in that *Particular*.

And 'tis one very good *Token* of a Man's own firm *Perswasion* of the Truth of what he says, if he gives his *Testimony* in a *grave* and *serious Manner*, and if he appears to have at that *Time* a good *Sense* of *Religion* in his *Mind*.

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Upon which Account a Solemn *Oath*, by which God is called upon to witness the Truth of what is said, is reck'ned the greatest Assurance that ordinarily can be given of the Truth of any humane Testimony; and therefore by Evidence given upon *Oath*, all Questions of the greatest Consequence to Men in this World are finally decided; *An Oath for Confirmation is to Men an End of all Strife*. Seeing therefore that the great Credit that is given to an *Oath*, is grounded upon that serious *Sense of Religion* which the Witness is supposed to have in his Mind, when he declares that he speaks as in the Presence of Almighty God; whenever there is good Evidence given by any Person of the *same serious Sense of Religion*, his Testimony, tho' without the Formality of an *Oath*, is not less *credible*.

Again, It is a further *Token* of a Man's firm *Belief* of what he reports or affirms, in case, the Matter of his Report being such as is naturally influential upon Practice, *he himself lives and acts in all Respects agreeably thereto*: And especially, if in Consequence thereof he *declines* making such *Gain* and *Profit* to himself as 'tis probable he would have done had he been otherwise persuaded; and *denies* himself those worldly *Pleasures* and *Sensual Gratifications* which other Men, not so persuaded, do freely allow themselves in; and voluntarily *undertakes* such *Labours*, and *endures* such *Hardships* as it can hardly be supposed any Man of another Perswasion would undergo.

But the surest *Token* that any Man can give of his *Veracity*, is *persisting* in the Evidence he has once given to the last; When no Pro-

Serm. mises of Wealth, Honour or Promotion can
 I. persuade him to forbear speaking the things
 which he has seen and heard; when being
 brought before Kings and Rulers, and straitly
 threatened to hold his Peace, he is thereby rather
 the more emboldened to speak; when being
 racked and tortured to retract his Evidence,
 he continues in the midst of the greatest Torments,
 to witness the same thing that he did before;
 And in fine, when having a certain Prospect
 before him of losing all that can be dear to him
 in this World, and even his Life it self, unless he
 will either go back from what he has said, or at
 least forbear to repeat and confirm it; he willingly
 and chearfully Seals his Testimony with his Blood.

Such Assurance as this we may have of the
 Honesty and Veracity of a Person that witnesses
 a thing only of his own private Knowledge; And
 this being the best we can have, he's an unreasonable
 Man that desires more, or says this is not sufficient.

But *Secondly*, in Case the Author of any
 Book, or of any Report, relates a Thing that
 was done or spoken publicly, in the Sight or
 Hearing of many others besides himself, we may
 have still greater Assurance, of his Honesty and
 Veracity, and of the Truth of the Report it self;
 And we have so, (we have, I think, the greatest
 that can be,) if, *after* the Report is published,
 especially if it be a Matter of great Consequence
 to the World, it be not *contradicted* by any of those
 that were present; and much rather, if *they all*, or
 a great many of them, agree in testifying the
 same thing; Especially if they also are Persons
 of the like good Credit, and if

if they also give the *same Proofs and Tokens* of Sermon, their *Veracity* that he did.

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Such Evidence as this of the *Veracity* of any Author in what he writes, is beyond all reasonable Exception. And therefore when many, and especially when all these Evidences of Truth and Honesty do concur, I think we may be *sufficiently assured* that he did not design to impose upon his Readers. But,

(3.) If we may be well enough assured of the Author of any Book, and also of his Honesty; yet, it was further objected, that this *Author*, whoever he was, could not be sure that he himself was not deceived in his *Opinion* of his own *Inspiration*, or of a *Revelation* made to *himself*; Or in the *Truth* of any other *Matter of Fact* which he has related as of his own *Knowledge*.

But, *First*, If he could not be sure of his own *Inspiration*, or of a *Revelation* made to himself; how then could *any Man* now a-days be *sure* of the same, if *GOD* should vouchsafe to speak to us now, as 'tis said he did in former times to the *Prophets* and other *inspir'd Men*, by *himself*, or an *Angel*? So that this Objection, if it be well grounded, cuts off not only all reasonable Belief of former Revelations, but likewise all Reasonable Belief of any Revelation that can now be made, to our selves or others; And 'tis to no Purpose to offer at any thing to convince *those* of the Truth of any Revelation who are of *Opinion* that even the infinite Power and Wisdom of *GOD* cannot make such a Revelation of his Will to them as would be *credible*, such as they should reasonably judge *sufficient* for their Conviction.

Serm. This therefore is all that I shall say to this

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as they seem to do, that Almighty G O D cannot any ways so reveal his Will to any Man, as that the *Prophet* himself can be assured that it is a divine Revelation; they suppose G O D to be of less *Power* and *Skill* than a *Man* is, who can utter his Mind in such a Manner to another, that the other shall have no Doubt, who it is that speaks, or what he means: But if they will but vouchsafe to grant, that G O D could now speak, or otherwise reveal his Will, in such Manner to us, as that we could not possibly have any Doubt, whether it was the *Voice* of G O D or an *Angel*, or not, then I say there can be no Question but that he might speak in as plain a Manner to Men in former Times; and there is almost as little Question but that he has done so.

But many (it may be said) have pretended to *Inspiration* or *Revelations*, and, we have Reason to believe, have thought themselves inspired, when yet the *Matter* they have said they were inspired with, or which they have said has been revealed to them has been such as has clearly evidenced to all rational Men the *Falsity* of their Pretence.

True; And so likewise many Men have thought themselves at such a Place, in such a Company, hearing, seeing, speaking or doing such and such things, when yet, as it proves afterwards, they have been all the while only in a *Dream*: But what then? Does it follow that because a Man may think himself awake when he is in a *Dream*, he can therefore never be sure that he is awake? And as

little

little does it follow, that because some Persons of weak or distempered Brains have thought they have had Revelations, therefore no sober and judicious Man in his right Wits, can ever be sure of a Revelation.

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But suppose a Man at the first, being (as it may well be imagined he must be) in a great Surprise and Astonishment at the Strangeness and Novelty of the thing, should not be very certain of the Reality of the Revelation, should not well know whether he was awake or asleep; yet certainly the same signs which are sufficient afterwards to satisfy other Men of the Truth his Inspiration or Revelation, must be allowed to be sufficient to satisfy himself of the same thing.

And therefore, If Moses (for instance) when God first spake to him in Horeb out of the burning Bush, was in some Doubt whether he was in a Trance, or awake and in his right Mind; whether he really heard a Voice, or only dream'd so: it can't well be supposed that he continued in the same Doubt afterwards, when having at God's Command, cast his Rod upon the Ground, it became a Serpent; and having at the same divine Command taken it up by the Tail, it became a Rod again in his Hand: And when after that, by his first putting his Hand into his Bosom it became leprous as Snow, and after his putting it in the second Time, it came out like his other Flesh.

Exod. iii.
2.

Exod. iv.
3, 4.

Ver. 6, 7.

Or if it can be imagined that he might possibly take all this to be only a Continuation of his Dream; or at least, might not in all this while be sure that it was not a Dream; it is not conceiveable, however, that in all the Time

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that he was travelling from *Horeb* into *Egypt*, he should not ever be so thoroughly awake as to be *sure* that he was *awake*; and if he was, that he should not in all that Time make such *Reflections* upon what had passed, as either to perceive plainly that it had been only a *Dream*, or else to be very *certain* that it had not been a *Dream*, but a *Reality*.

Or if it can be conceived that his Amazement and Concern at what had happened was so great, that in all this Time he might not be so well come to himself, as to be sure that he had *had* a true divine Revelation; yet I think it was not possible that he should remain in the same Uncertainty, after he had been in *Egypt* for some while, and had wrought, not only those two Miracles over again in the Sight of the *Israelites*, whereby they were fully perswaded of his divine Mission; but likewise all the other great Signs and Wonders mentioned in the viith and following Chapters of *Exodus*, some of which the *Egyptians*, and even the *Magicians* themselves could not but acknowledge were done by the Finger of God.

But this, It may be will be said, is proving one doubtful thing by another as doubtful, a Revelation by a Miracle; for it was further urged in the Objection, that no Author of any Book could be *sure* that he was not deceived in any other Matter that he has related as of his own Knowledge; that 'tis possible there might be Mistake in the Sign and Proof of the divine Revelation as well as in the Revelation it self; that 'tis possible that the Author of the Report (whether it was the Prophet himself,

or

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I.

or any other Man who has reported the Miracles done by the *Prophet*, as Matters of his own Knowledge) did *imagine* he *saw* things which he did not see, and that he *heard* things which he did not hear.

But if this be supposed possible, that any Man, and much more that several Men agreeing in the same Report, the Organs of whose Senses were rightly disposed, and who by all their other Actions and Discourses appeared to be sober, and considerate, and judicious, should yet in the Day time, and in a clear Light, and when they were sure they were broad awake, be mistaken in the plainest Matters of Sense; then there is no such thing as *Certainty* in the World; Then they that make the Objection can be no more sure of what they themselves see and hear than other Men can be; And 'tis to no Purpose to hold an Argument with such as dare not believe their own Eyes and Ears. The only sense whereby, I think, such Men can be convinced, must be *Feeling*: And it will be well for them if they can carry the same *Scepticism* with them into the other World, and when they are encompassed about with the *Flames of Hell*, can be able to doubt whether it be a *real* or a *painted* fire, whether they are *tormented* in that Flame, or not.

Leaving these therefore to be convinced in the other World, as being, I think, not capable of Conviction here; I shall content my self with having said, what, I suppose, is enough to satisfy others, That the *Witness* of a plain *Matter of Fact*, may be *sure* of the Truth of what he witnesses; and that 'tis possible for

GOD

Serm. GOD to speak so plainly to Men, that they
 I. may be *certain* they have had a divine Revelation; and that such Evidence may be given of the *Veracity* of an *Author*, and of the *Authority* of a *Book* as is *sufficient* to satisfy a reasonable Man.

And by this, and what was said before, I hope I have made it appear, that a *Standing Revelation* of GOD's Will may be so well contrived and so well attested as to be *sufficient* to effect its Design, viz. to bring Men to Repentance. Whether the *Standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scripture* be *sufficient* for this Purpose, will be matter of Enquiry in the next Discourses.

In the mean time, what has been already said may serve to dispose us to hear without Prejudice the Arguments that may be offered to prove the *sufficiency* of the *Holy Scripture*. For,

1. If it be possible that there may be such a *Standing Revelation*, it is very probable that there is one; for from that natural Notion that we have of the *Goodness* of GOD it may be fairly argued, that he is not wanting to Men in the necessary Means of Salvation; and therefore, it being evident that there are not new Revelations made every Day, it may be reasonably concluded that the Reason is, because there is already some *Standing Revelation* of GOD's Will extant that is *sufficient* to direct us in the Way to Happiness. And,

2. If there be already any such *Standing Revelation* extant, it may be strongly presumed, that it is that which we have in the *Holy Scripture*; because there is no other Book, that we

we know of, which has such good Evidences of divine Authority and Inspiration as *that* has. Serm. I.

Let us then be prepared to inquire into the Grounds and Reasons of the *Christian* Faith and Religion with unprejudiced Minds, with a sincere Love and Desire of Truth, and with a Resolution to hear Reason and to be convinced by it.

And above all, (which indeed is the best Preparation for Truth, and the best Security against Error) let us in the Sincerity of our Hearts, apply our selves to GOD for his Help and Direction; And that our Prayer may be effectual, let us be careful to approve our selves to him, by a conscientious Discharge of all those Duties of Piety, Justice, Temperance and Charity, which are clearly taught even by natural Reason; and be readily disposed to practise whatever else we shall learn to be our Duty by any farther Illumination: for if *any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God.* Joh. vii. 17.

The

we know of, which has left good Evidences behind
of divine Authority and Inspiration as was



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and Charity, which are clearly taught every
natural Reason; and be ready disposed to
practice whatever else we shall learn to be

John vii.

our Duty by any further Illumination; for
that will be to us the best way of our
Christian Warfare. Amen.

The

*The Sufficiency of the Scripture-
Revelation ;*

As to the Matter of it.

THE
Second SERMON,

Preach'd February 5th. 1699.

S^t LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses
and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if
one went unto them from the dead, they
will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses
and the Prophets, neither will they be per-
swaded, though one rose from the dead.*

THE first thing which I propounded
to do in Discourfing on these Words,
was, to endeavour to shew, that the
present *Standing Revelation* of God's Will,
contained in the *Books* of the *Old* and *New*
Testament is abundantly *sufficient* to persuade
Men to Repentance, if they are not unreason-
ably

Serm. ably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets, (they have also Christ and his Apostles,) let them hear them.*

II.

And if that *Standing Revelation* which God hath made to us of his Will in the *Holy Scriptures* can upon any Account be thought *insufficient* to effect this Design, it must be, I think, either, 1. Because no *Standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for this Purpose; Or, 2. Because there are some particular *Defects* in that Revelation which we have in the *Holy Scriptures* which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose, as 'tis possible a *Standing Revelation* might be.

I have, therefore, in a former Discourse upon these Words, endeavoured to shew in general, that a *Standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well contrived, and so well attested, as to be *sufficient* for this Purpose.

I proceed now, in the second place,

2. To Consider whether that *Standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scriptures*, be such a Revelation; whether it be *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, and fully to direct them in the Way to Happiness; Or, whether there be not some particular *Defects* in this Revelation, which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose as 'tis possible a *Standing Revelation* might be.

And if there be any such *Defect* in the *Holy Scripture*, it must be either in the *Matter* of it, or in the *Proof* of it: And if it be in the *Matter* of it, it must be, either that it does not give us *sufficient Directions* what to do, or that it does not propose *sufficient Motives* to persuade Men to do what it requires.

And

And therefore in speaking to this Head, I shall shew, (1.) That the *Holy Scripture* gives us *sufficient Directions* what to do. (2.) That the *Motives* which the *Scripture* proposes, are *sufficient* to persuade us to do what it requires; And, (3. That we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* which are taught by it.

(1.) I shall shew that the *Holy Scripture* gives us *sufficient Directions* what to do.

And of this there can be little Doubt among those that believe the divine Inspiration and Authority of the *Holy Scripture*; because to them its own Testimony of its own *Sufficiency* is a Proof thereof beyond all Exception. For, if, as the *Apostle* says, 2 *Tim.* iii. 16. it be profitable for *Doctrine*, and for *Reproof*, and for *Correction*, and for *Instruction in Righteousness*; it is plainly profitable for all the *Purposes* for which we can desire a divine Revelation. And, if, as he says in the next Verse, it was given to make perfect the *Man of God* (that is, the *Man* whose Business it is to teach and instruct others;) and thoroughly to furnish him unto all good Works, it cannot be deficient in delivering all such *Rules* and *Directions* as are necessary to be given by a *Pastor* to the People committed to his Care. And, if, as the same *Apostle* had said at the 15th Verse of that Chapter, it be able to make us wise unto *Salvation*, we have no Reason to desire to be wiser than this excellent Book can make us. And if all this could truly be said by the *Apostle*, before the *Canon* of the *New Testament* was completed; if it could be said by him

of

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II.

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II.

of those *Holy Scriptures* which *Timothy* had known from a Child, that is, of the *Books* of the *Old Testament* only, much more may it be now said of the *Books* of both *Testaments* together.

But to speak at large of this Point, at present, would be too great a Digression from the Design of these *Lectures*, which were intended only against *Infidels*, not against any *Sett* of *Christians*; and such they pretend to be; such (because they hold the Foundation *Christ Jesus*,) they may in Charity be allow'd to be, who do chiefly differ from us in this Article, and deny the *Sufficiency* of *Scripture*, only because they are resolved to maintain some gainful *Doctrines* and *Practices* of their own *Church*, which they are sensible have no Warrant from *Scripture*, and so can be maintained no other Way but by affirming that they have been delivered down to them by *Tradition*, and that *unwritten Tradition* is a necessary *Supplement* to the *written Word*, and of equal *Authority* with it.

For between us and *Infidels* who reject the *Scripture*, the *Sufficiency* of the *Scripture* as a *Rule* of Faith and Manners, is hardly Matter of *Controversie*: for these do not reject the *Scripture* because it teaches too little, but rather because it teaches too much: because it teaches *Doctrines* above their *Reason*, and commands such *Duties* as they do not like to *practise*; and if it taught less than it does, they would be more ready to own its divine *Authority*.

But nevertheless even *these Men* (that they may leave no Stone unturned) will be sometimes

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times discoursing upon this Point; and altho' those *Books of Holy Scripture* which are now extant, and which are now generally receiv'd, do teach much more than they themselves are willing to believe and practise, yet, that they may, as much as they can, unsettle the Belief of others, do not stick to argue against the *Christian Religion* from this *Topick*, and to affirm that the *Books of Holy Scripture* which are now receiv'd do not contain the whole Will of G O D. For there were, say they, in former times, several other *Gospels* and *Epistles*, and other *Tracts*, designed to instruct Men in the *Christian Religion*, which were written by the *Apostles* or other *inspired Men*, and which were consequently of the same Authority, in themselves, with those which are now receiv'd into the *Canon*, of which nevertheless we have nothing now left, but the Names and Titles, or some imperfect and uncertain Fragments; so that it may well be doubted, whether those few *Books* which are now remaining, are sufficient to instruct us in all necessary Points of Knowledge and Practice. And of this Matter of Fact, there is, they say, some Evidence even from the *Scripture* it self: For St. *Luke*, in the Beginning of his *Gospel* takes Notice, that many before him, had taken in Hand to set forth a Declaration of those things which were surely believed among *Christians*; that is, had written and published *Narratives* of the Life, Actions, Miracles, Preaching, Death and Resurrection of our *Saviour*. But there are no *Histories* of this Kind, no *Gospels* now extant, that were written before St. *Luke's*, except only St. *Mat-*

Luke i. 1.

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thew's and St. Mark's; and if there had been no more extant at that time, it would have been very improper, they say, for the Evangelist to have said, that many had written upon this Subject, when he spake only of those two. And that there was Matter enough for several such Narratives (so that tho' they were very different Gospels, they might nevertheless be all true) we are told by St. John, who wrote his Gospel the last of the Four Evangelists, John xx. 30. Many other Signs truly did Jesus in the Presence of his Disciples, which are not written in this Book; and again, Ch. xxi. Vers. 25. There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the World it self could not contain the Books that should be written.

Now if it be true, that there were several other Books formerly extant, but which are now lost, that were written by the Apostles and other inspired Men, and consequently by divine Inspiration; either these were needless when written, (and it is unreasonable to suppose that any Book written by divine Inspiration was needless) or else the Loss of these Books is a Loss to Religion; and we cannot be well assured, that those which we have now remaining do sufficiently instruct us in all Points of Christian Faith and Practice.

But admit the Truth of this Matter of Fact, viz. that more Books were written by the Apostles, or other inspired Men, than are now extant, (which I will not now dispute, because I think it needless; because I think it may be granted without any Prejudice to the

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Christian Cause; altho' there be none, or at most but very slender Evidence of it;) nay, admit more than is upon any good Grounds alledged; viz. not only that several, but that every one of the *Apostles* and immediate *Disciples of Christ*, every one that had heard him Preach, and had been a Witness of his Life, and Miracles and Resurrection, and had received the Miraculous Gifts of the *Holy Ghost*, did write a distinct *Gospel*, giving an Account of some of the most remarkable Passages of our *Saviour's* Life which he had been a Witness of; and did likewise, as he had Occasion, write *Epistles* or other *Traacts* for the Use and Instruction of the *Christian Church*; every one of all which *Books*, if they were now extant, and as well attested as the *Books* of the *New Testament* are, would be of equal Authority with them, because dictated by the same Spirit, by which all the *Apostles* were led into all Truth, and had all things that *Jesus* had spoken brought to their Remembrance; yet, I say, it would by no Means follow from hence, either that those *Books* which are now lost (if indeed there are any lost that were written by the *Apostles*) were needless when they were written; or that those which do now remain are not sufficient. And a very little Consideration of the State of things as it was then, and as it is now, will make this which I have said very plain.

Joh. xvi.

13.

—xiv. 26.

For the Case then was thus: The *Gospel of Christ* was to be Preached to the whole World by a few Persons who had been Eye-witnesses of his Miracles, and were enabled by the

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Power of the *Holy Ghost* to confirm their Testimony of him by doing the like Miracles themselves; And that this great Work might be accomplished within the *Term* of their *Life*, it was necessary that they should quickly *disperse* themselves into all Parts of the World, one going this Way and another that, according as they had agreed among themselves, or were directed by the *Spirit*; And in this Division of Countries, every one had a *large Province* assigned to him, so that having much Work to do in a little Time, he could not well stay long in one Place; And upon this account it might be very proper for him after he had Preached the *Gospel* in one City, and made a good number of *Converts*, and ordained Elders, and established a *Christian Church* there, when he went thence to leave behind him in Writing the Sum of what he had before Preached among them, for the Help of their Memories, for the Direction of their Pastors, and to prevent any Mis-representation that might afterwards be made of his Doctrine by ignorant or designing Men; And after he was gone from thence, he might have frequent Occasion to send them *Letters* either to confirm them in their Faith, or to caution them against some Errors which he had heard were springing up among them, or to correct some Fault in their Discipline or Manners.

By this Means, I say, it might well enough be (tho' there be no Evidence that it was so) that in the first Age of Christianity, there might be, besides occasional *Letters*, as many distinct *Gospels* as there were *Apostles*; every
One

One writing a *Gospel* for the proper Use of Serm.
II.
those *Churches* which he himself had planted, and in the Language that was Best known to them. And this, if it was done, might be no more than might be *then* necessary, when it was not so easy as it is now (since the Increase of Commerce and Navigation, and the Invention of Printing) to communicate and disperse the Books that are Published in one Country, to other Countries that are far distant. Besides, if this could have been done then, it can't well be supposed that a *Gospel* written by any *other* of the *Apostles*, who had never been in that *Province* or *Division*, and of whom they had never heard perhaps more than only his Name, should be at first of so great Authority to them, as a *Gospel* written by that very *Apostle*, by whose *Ministry* they had been *converted*, and of whose *Miracles* they themselves had been *Witnesses*.

Thus it might be ; (and if it was so, it might be agreeable to the divine Wisdom and Goodness so to order it) that before those *Books* of the *New Testament* which we now have could be well dispersed, and upon good Attestation receiv'd in all *Christian* Countries, some particular *Churches*, and especially those most remote from *Judea*, should have for their present Use, *other Books* written by some *other* of the *Apostles*, containing the same *Form of sound Words*, and relating the same things concerning the Life and Doctrine of our *Saviour* that *these* do.

And that some of those many *Books* which might be written by the *Apostles* or other in-
D 3 inspired

Serm. inspired Men upon this Subject, should be *lost*, is
 II. no Marvel at all: 'tis rather a Wonder (con-
 sidering the Poverty of the first *Christians*, and
 the constant Persecutions they were then under,
 and the many Revolutions of Government that
 have been in *Christendom* since that time,) that
 so many as we have now left could be pre-
 served for so many Ages before Printing was
 found out. And those were of all the most
 likely to be *lost*, which were published in
rude and *barbarous* Countries, and which
 were written in some *Language* that was pe-
 culiar to one Nation only: And those the
 most easie, and consequently the most pro-
 bable to be *preserved*, which were published
 in the *learned* Part of the World, and writ-
 ten in the most *learned Language* then in
 Use.

But altho' a greater Number of *inspired Books*
 than are now extant, might be necessary in
 the first Age of *Christianity*; before the *Chri-
 stian Churches*, then newly planted in all Coun-
 tries of the then known World, could have
 Communication with one another; it cannot
 be argued from hence that *those Books* which
 we have now remaining are *not sufficient* for
 the present Time, and for all the Time that
 has passed since the *other Books* were *lost*; But
 rather, it may very reasonably be presumed,
 that there was *nothing* more, for Substance, in
those Books, which are supposed to be *lost*, than
 there is in *these* which are now *remaining*;
 so that the Loss of them may be no real Loss
 or Detriment to Religion, and those which
 remain and are now receiv'd in all *Christian*
Churches, may be abundantly *sufficient* to in-
 struct

struct us in all Points of *Christian Faith and Practice.* Serm. II.

And there is indeed no Reason to think they are not, seeing some of those single Books which we have now, were written for this very Purpose, were designed as *Compendiums* of the whole *Christian Institution*: For St. Luke wrote his Gospel, that Theophilus, might know the Certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed; And if this was the Evangelist's Design, it can't be supposed but that he thought he had put into his Gospel whatever was necessary or very material: And St. John in the same Place where he acknowledges that he had omitted the Relation of many things which Jesus did, says that he had written the things contained in his Gospel, that Men might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of GOD, and that believing they might have Life through his Name: By which it appears that he thought he himself had written enough in his Gospel to persuade Men to believe in Christ, and to direct them in the Way to eternal Life. There being therefore in those Books of the New Testament which we now have several Abridgments of the whole *Christian Doctrine*, it cannot with any Reason be pretended, that all these Books together are not sufficient fully to instruct us therein. Luk. i. 4. Joh. xx. 30, 31.

Besides; The Gospel of Christ that was Preached, suppose, by St. Thomas in India, or by St. Simon in Africa, or by any other of the Apostles in Countries remote from Judea, or without the Bounds of the Roman Empire, was undoubtedly the very same Gospel that

Serm. was Preached by St. Peter and St. Paul, or
 II. those other of the *Apostles* whose *Books* are now extant, and received by the *Catholick Church*; for they were all taught by the same Master *Christ*; and were all enlightned by the same *Holy Ghost*: so that if any of them did, (as 'tis reported they did) write any *Gospels* for the present Use of those particular *Churches* which they had planted; tho' they might be somewhat *different* from any of the *Four Gospels* which we now have, in the Expression, or perhaps in the Relation of some particular Passages of our *Saviour's* Life, which *Our Evangelists* have omitted: (just as the *Four Gospels* which we now have, do differ from one another) yet for Substance they must needs have been the *same* with *these*, and with *one another*, if indeed they were all *true Relations* of the Matters of which the Authors thereof had been Witnesses; so that if we had them all now, they could all together teach us no other Doctrines than are taught in the *Books* of the *New Testament*.

Nevertheless, I do not deny but that if we had more Books of this Kind than we have; that if we had all the Books that were written by the *Apostles*, or their immediate *Successors* who had been taught by them, they might be of very good Use to us, to help us to understand more readily and easily those Books which we have (as now we receive from some Portions of *Holy Scripture*, great Light, to help us to understand, and to put a right Interpretation upon others:) But perhaps it was for *this* very Reason that the Providence of GOD did
 order

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order no more to be *written*, than were written, or has *suffered* those to be *lost* that are supposed to be lost, that it might *cost* us some *Pains* and *Study* to *understand* our *Religion*; that so our *Knowledge* as well as our *Practice* being in some Measure the *Fruit* of our own *Industry*, might be a proper *Subject* of *Reward*.

In short, That there were *more Books* in the first Age of *Christianity*, written by *Apostles* or other *inspired Men* that are now extant, or than if extant can be well proved to be of *their Writing*, is a Point which I believe cannot be now upon any certain Evidence either affirmed or denied; But if it be granted, I say however, there is no Reason to *infern* from thence, that those which we now have are *not sufficient*. For if there be a *GOD* and a *Providence*, and if there be any *Truth* in the *Scripture-Declarations* of the *Love* of *GOD* to *Mankind*, and that *he would have all Men to be saved, and to come to the Knowledge of the Truth*, most certainly the necessary Means of Mens Salvation is a proper Subject of the divine Care: And if so; it can't be thought but that the same good Providence which (as is now supposed) took Care for the *writing* of *more Books* when more might be necessary, has likewise taken Care for the *Preservation* of *so many* of these Books as are now *sufficient*.

1 Tim. ii. 4.

Or if the Men we are now arguing with, will not grant that there is such a particular Providence of *GOD*; yet if they will but allow that *GOD* is *just*: that he is not a *hard Master*, expecting to *reap where he has not sown*, I think they must allow that all things necessary to our Salvation, not knowable by Reason,
are

Serm. are taught in the *Books of Holy Scripture* which
 II. we *now* have, because there are no *other Books*
 extant which we have reason to receive and
 accept as divine Revelation.

Or if they deny this, it will lie upon them
 to produce those *other Books* which we ought
 to receive besides these, and to give good Evi-
 dence to the World of their divine Authority.
 Which when they shall have done; or if they
 shall but only shew that there is *as good* Rea-
 son to receive *them* as these; We must own our
 selves to blame, if we shall not then take them
 also into the *Canon of Scripture*.

But till that shall be done, what hath been
 already said is enough to shew that the *Holy*
Scripture is a compleat *Rule* both of *Faith* and
Manners. Especially considering (as was noted
 before) that when-ever the *Insufficiency* of *Scripture*
 in this Respect, is urged by *those* who do
 not believe the *Scripture* (which are the Per-
 sons I have now to deal with,) it can be only
 for Cavilling sake: the true Reason of their
 Backwardness to receive it as a divine Revela-
 tion, being, not because it teaches not enough,
 but because it teaches more than they are wil-
 ling to believe, and commands more than they
 are disposed to practise. For I cannot imagine
 that *these Men* do truly desire *more Duty* than
 is laid upon them in the *Books of Scripture* now
 received by the Christian Church; But what
 they may most reasonably be thought to desire,
 is either some *better Encouragement* to under-
 take that difficult Task which the *Scripture* lays
 upon them, or some *better Evidence* that the
Scripture is a *divine Revelation*.

I pro-

I proceed now therefore to the second thing propounded, which was, Serm. II.

(2.) To shew that the *Motives* which the *Scripture* proposes are *sufficient* to persuade Men to do what it requires.

Now *Hopes* and *Fears* are the great Springs of Action; and the greater the Good is we hope for, or the Evil we fear, the stronglier do they move and incline us to Action; And therefore how difficult soever the Undertaking be, (so it be but possible;) if the *Motives* are proportioned to the *Difficulty*, they must be granted to be *sufficient Inducements* to undertake it.

But that the Task or Business required of us, is possible to be done, needs not to be proved now, because it must be granted by those who say they believe they should be persuaded to do what is required, if they had better *Encouragement*; for no *Arguments* or *Motives* whatsoever can reasonably persuade a Man to undertake a thing that he believes impossible.

Supposing it therefore possible; I say that whatsoever *Difficulty* there really is, or we may apprehend there is, in a Christian Life; if any *Motives* that could possibly be proposed to us can be thought *sufficient* to induce us to undertake it; most evidently, those *Motives* which the *Gospel* proposes, are so; because better or greater cannot be so much as conceived or imagined; seeing both the good things which it promises to persuade us to Virtue, and the evil things which it threatens to deterr us from Sin, are, as to the *Matter* of them, the *greatest* that we are capable of enjoying

Serm. enjoying or suffering; and consequently the most
 II. probable to raise our Hopes, and to excite
 our Fears to the highest Pitch.

For the Arguments that do most strongly persuade us to any thing, are from *Interest*; from the Profit and Advantage we shall reap by doing it; from the Tendency it has to make us happy; and *Happiness* consists in being perfectly free from all Pain and Trouble and Vexation; and in the full and free Enjoyment of whatsoever is pleasing and delightful to us.

But now both these the Gospel gives Assurance of to all those that believe and obey it; that is, that they shall thereby be freed from that intolerable Pain and Misery, which the Wicked and Unbelievers shall be condemned to, and also that they shall thereby be instated in the perfectest and compleatest Happiness both of Body and Soul; In a Happiness far greater than any they do or can enjoy now, nay, in a Happiness much greater than any they can now have so much as a Conception or Idea of in
 (Cor. ii. 9. their Minds. *For Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entered into the Heart of Man the things that GOD hath prepared for them that love him.*

But there is, besides, a remarkable Circumstance which does much enhance the Value of any Good, and likewise much aggravate the Evil of any Pain or Misery; viz. its *Duration*: For how great soever the Good or Evil proposed to persuade us to any thing, are in themselves; yet if they be but of short Continuance, if they will soon expire and be at an End, we reckon it not worth while to be at much Pains to obtain such a short-liv'd Good, or to avoid such

such a transient Evil. But in this respect also, the *Motives* both of Hope and Fear which the Gospel proposes to us, do far surpass all those Persuatives or Inducements which Sin can offer: for the most we can hope to escape by the Commission of any Sin, is the Pain and Suffering of a few Weeks or Years, or a temporal Death; which last, yet, we cannot be so vain as to hope to escape clearly, for we can at most but delay it for a short Season; And on the other side, the greatest Good we can propose to our selves, or so much as hope to obtain by any Sin, is the Pleasure of a short Life: In which Hope, Men are likewise very often most sadly disappointed; their sinful Gratifications commonly bringing with them, or drawing after them, much more Trouble and Vexation even in this World, than the little Pleasure they can reap from them is sufficient to compensate for. But if it were not so; If the Pleasures of Sin were certain and sincere; yet they are but for a Moment; They can be but short, because our Life it self is but short; being (as St. James says) *a Vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

But the *Motives* of both kinds, which the Gospel proposes, have in this Respect also, (that is, in Respect of the *Duration* of the Good or Evil proposed) all the Advantage that is possible. For the Misery we shall escape, and the Blessedness we shall attain, by yielding Belief and Obedience to the Gospel, are, both of them, of *eternal and endless Duration.* *A Worm that never dieth, a Fire that never shall be quenched; Everlasting Punishment; Eternal*

Damna-

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II.

Jam. iv. 14.

Mar. 9. 46, 48.

Matt. 25. 46.

Mark 3. 29.

Serm. *Damnation; Everlasting Fire; Everlasting Destruction; The Blackness of Darkness, for ever;*

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A Lake of Fire and Brimstone, where they shall be tormented Day and Night for ever and ever; and where the smoke of their Torment ascendeth up for ever, and ever. These are the Evils which the Gospel threatens to Sin: And if these be not sufficient to deterr Men from it, what can be sufficient? What Evil can that Man be supposed to be afraid of who is not afraid of everlasting Burning? A greater Evil cannot be threatned; and he who is not scared by this, would certainly be less scared by the Threatning of a less Evil. And on the other side, Everlasting Life; an incorruptible Crown; an Inheritance that fadeth not away; a Kingdom that cannot be moved; an eternal Weight of Glory; Fulness of Joy in the Presence of GOD, and Pleasures for evermore at his right Hand; these are the good things promised to Obedience; And could greater things be promised than these? could we our selves, if we were put to desire what we would, desire more? and if the Promise of unspeakable and everlasting Blessedness, be not sufficient to prevail with us to undertake a Godly and Christian Life, certainly nothing can be sufficient. If GOD should make never so many Revelations of his Will to Mankind, he could not propose greater Encouragement to Obedience, than he has done already in the Gospel: And if those good things which he has promised, do not move us, 'tis not because they are not great enough to move a wise and considering Man, but because we are so bent upon Sin that we will not give way to any Considerations that might serve to restrain us from it.

Matth. 18. 8.

2 Thess. 1. 9.

Jude 13.

Rev. 20. 10.

—14. 11.

Mat. 25. 46.

1 Cor. 9. 25.

1 Pet. 1. 4.

2 Cor. 4. 17.

Psal. 16. 11.

In a Word ; The *Gospel Motives* to Repen-
tance and Obedience comprehend all that we
can fear or hope for ; so far therefore as Fears
or Hopes can work upon us, there is plainly
nothing wanting in that *Standing Revelation* that
GOD has made of his Will, by *Moses and the*
Prophets, and especially by *Christ* and his *Apo-*
stles, to make it successful, that is, to persuade
Men to Repentance, if they will but hear what
they say and give Credit to it.

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But 'tis not, perhaps the *Infidels* will say, a
better Rule that they Want, than the *Scripture* is,
or better *Motives* to persuade them to lead their
Lives according to it, than the *Scripture* pro-
poses ; but what they chiefly want, is some bet-
ter Evidence, some greater Certainty of the Truth
of the *Scripture*.

This therefore was what I propounded to do
in the next place ; viz. To shew that we have
sufficient Reason given us to convince us of the
Truth and Authority of the *Holy Scripture*, and
consequently of all the Doctrines which are
taught by it.

But because the handling of this Point would
take up too much Time, I shall chuse to deferr
it ; and conclude this present Discourse with
an earnest *Exhortation* to all those that do sin-
cerely believe the *Gospel*, to consider often and
seriously of those great *Motives* which it pro-
poses to persuade Men.

For tho' we live in an Age of great *Infir-*
deliry, wherein some are bold enough to strike
at the very Foundation of all Religion, and
to dispute at least, if not deny the most evi-
dent and undeniable Truths of it ; and others
think they pay Respect enough to the com-
mon

Serm. II. mon Reason and Judgment of Mankind, if they do but grant themselves to be *Deists*; and wherein, even among those that openly profess the *Christian* Religion, there is in a great many a Spice and Tincture of *Atheism* and *Infidelity*; and tho' they do not actually dis-believe the Gospel-Truths, yet they believe them so coldly and faintly, that their Faith may rather be called an Inclination to believe, than a full Persuasion; I say, even in this incredulous and unbelieving Age, I am nevertheless verily persuaded, that for *one* Man that is ruin'd by *Infidelity*, many hundreds are ruined by *Thoughtlessness* and *Inconsideration*; that where there is *one* that is wicked, because he believes nothing of the *Gospel-motives*, nor that there is any such Place or State as Heaven or Hell, there are a great many that do believe these things, and yet continue in their wicked Course, because they never take any time seriously to consider what Heaven and Hell are; and that vast, that infinite difference that there is between these two States; and how much it behoves them to use all Diligence to attain that, and to avoid this.

Serm. III, IV, V, VI. Leaving therefore those who believe little or nothing of these things to my following Discourses, wherein I hope to prove the *Truth* of the *Gospel Revelation*, beyond all reasonable Exception; I shall now address my self to you that do *believe* these things, and who, every time you meet together in the Church do repeat all the *Articles* of the *Christian Faith*, and declare your *Assent* thereto. And what I would desire of you is; that you would frequently think of those things which you profess to believe,

lieve, that you would *meditate* much and often thereupon, that you would seriously *consider* the Meaning thereof.

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Particularly, That *Summary* of the Gospel *Motives* to Faith and Repentance before spoken of, that great and last Article of the *Christian Creed*, *The Life everlasting*; Consider what it means, and do not content your selves only with saying every Day that you do believe an *everlasting Life after this*, but meditate likewise every Day, or very frequently at least, what an *everlasting Life* is, and of what *Sort* and *Kind* that everlasting Life will be.

Now *Life* is a state of *Sensation*; By *this* a Living Body is distinguished from a dead Carcass, that the *living* Body *feels* what is done unto it, and is affected thereby either with Pain or Pleasure; whereas a *dead* Carcass is not capable of either, hath no Sense or Feeling of any thing. When therefore in repeating the *Creed*, we declare that we believe we shall live again, after our death, the meaning is, that we shall be hereafter in such a State of *Sensation* as we are in now; that in that Life we shall be as *sensible* of Pain or Pleasure, as we are in this Life.

But then, what makes the great Difference between this Life and that, is, that *this* is *short*, *transient* and *momentary*, that if it be pleasant, it is soon over, and that if it be painful it will not last long; whereas *that*, such as it is once, such it will *ever* be; for that's the Meaning of a *Life everlasting*; 'tis a Life that will never be ended; A Life that will continue to all Eternity.

E

And

Serm. And now that we come to speak of *Eter-*

II.

nity, tho' the Word has a fix'd Meaning; yet how are our Thoughts lost and bewildered when we set our selves to meditate there-upon? When we speak of a thousand, or ten thousand, or even of a Million of Years, we have some Notion of what we say; but when we come to multiply these thousands, and Millions, by ten thousands, or ten Millions, or by Millions of Millions, our Thoughts are not capacious enough to conceive, and our Mouths want Words to express that infinite Length of Time which these Numbers do comprehend; And yet all that these Numbers denote, is nothing in Comparison with *Eternity*.

If the whole Sea were to run out Drop by Drop, what a prodigious Length of Time would this take up; and yet in time this would be done; and they that live for ever would live to see the vast Caverns of the Ocean without one Drop of Water left in them: And which is more yet, there would be no Part of their Eternity then spent, they would then be as far from dying as they were at first.

Or if only once in ten thousand Years, one of the smallest Sands or Dusts were to be taken from the Earth, they that live for ever would live to see all this vast Bulk of the Earth by these slow and imperceptible Degrees wholly removed, not so much as a Grain or Atom of it left; Nay, and even in this prodigious, this unconceivable Length of Time, their Life would not be in the least diminished, they would have the same boundless Eternity

still

still before them that they had, when the first Sand was taken away. Serm.
II.

But what do I speak of these little Numbers, these Moments of Time, as they may truly be called, in Comparison with Eternity? For even all those Years in which the whole Earth might be removed, if only one single smallest Dust thereof were to be taken away once in ten thousand Years, (I say, all these Years) may be expressed in Figures, in a Line of a few Inches long; But if the whole Expanse of Heaven were written quite over with Figures from the Top to the Bottom, and from one Side to the other, even all these Figures, tho' set so close that there was not Room left for one more, would not denote or express *Eternity*; And when all these numberless Millions of Years were spent, He that lives for ever, would be (as it were) but just then beginning to live; and his Sight and Prospect of the Time before him, would be still as boundless as ever.

Thus you see what is *eternal Life*; Or rather, you see what *it is not*; It is a Length of Time that cannot be expressed in Words, or signified by Figures, or conceived in Thought: It is a Length of Time to which all that we can have any positive Notion of, bears no Proportion.

And when we believe that we shall live *such a Life*, after this short Life is over; does it not highly behove us to think of it now; and to make the best Provision that is possible that we may be happy in it?

And this leads me to the other Branch of Meditation on this Subject, which we ought like-

Serm. wise frequently and seriously to dwell upon in
 II. our Minds; namely of *what Sort and Kind* this
 eternal Life will be.

And as 'tis *Life*, 'tis (as was said before) a State of *Sensation*; and as it is an *everlasting Life*, 'tis a State in which we shall for ever feel our selves, either in *Pain* or at *Ease*.

And if there were no more in it than this; tho' the *Pain* we shall then endure were the least of those Pains wherewith we are now afflicted, a little Pain or Aking of one Joint or Member only; Or though the *Pleasure* we shall then enjoy; were one of the least of those Pleasures wherewith we are now delighted; yet when we have added *Eternity* to these, what an infinite Difference is there between these two States? And how well must we needs think it worth all the Pains and Labour that we can take in this World, to secure to our selves a Portion in that better Sort of everlasting Life, in that Life in which there is no *Pain*, tho' there be but little *Pleasure*?

But still our Thoughts are short; we have not yet a just Notion of the Difference between these two States. For if we believe the *Scripture* (and I speak now to those that do believe it,) that everlasting *Pain* which the wicked will be condemned to, is not a light or gentle Pain; but the *sharpest*, the *acute*st, the most tormenting that can be endured; and that eternal Joy which we have a good Hope of by the *Gospel*, is likewise the *greatest*, the *fullest*, the *complete*st that we are capable of; for in representing the former to us, the *Scripture* all along expresses the *Torments of Hell* by such

Pains

Pains as are here most afflicting to us ; as the *Biting* and *Gnawing* of a *Worm*, the being *beaten* with *Stripes*, the *noysomness* of *Brimstone*, and the *Burning* of *Fire* ; And on the other side, when it would represent to us the *Happiness* of the *Blessed*, it does it by resembling the heavenly Joys, to such Pleasures as do here upon Earth most sensibly delight us, such as are the Pleasures of a spacious, rich and commodious *Dwelling*, of the choicest *Delicacies* to please the Taste, of the rarest *Melody* to delight the Ear, of a *Crown*, and a *Kingdom*, and an *exceeding Weight of Glory*, and of whatever else can gratifie or please any of our Senses.

Now tho' these Representations or Descriptions of Hell and Heaven are not perhaps to be understood literally ; the Scripture herein speaking, not according to the Strictness of Truth, but according to our present Capacities and Apprehensions, who have now very little Notion of any Pain or Pleasure but what affects the Senses of our Body ; yet thus much may most certainly be concluded from those Descriptions of these two States which we meet with in Scripture ; that both the Torments of Hell and the Joys of Heaven, are as *great* as they can possibly be ; far beyond any thing that we now feel or enjoy, or can have any Notion of ; And in a Word, that as the *Pain* of Hell is *endless*, so it is likewise *intolerable*, and that as the *Joy* of Heaven is *perpetual*, so it is likewise *unspeakable and full of Glory*.

And now after this short tho' very imperfect Representation of these two vastly different States of Men in that other, and ever-

Serm.

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Serm. lasting Life that will begin when this is over;
 II. I think I may fairly ask again, What God could have done more, either to deterr us from Sin, than to threaten *Hell-torments* to those that live in it; or to encourage us to Obedience, than to promise to those that continue in well doing, the unspeakable *Happiness* of *Heaven*? Certainly, if these *Motives* will not prevail upon us, no other can be proposed, that would prevail.

Nay further; Tho' I have hitherto spoken to you as to *Christians*, which believe the Scripture, and that there will certainly be another Life after this, even such a Life as I have been speaking of, an *everlasting* Life of perfect *Happiness*, or extreme *Misery*; yet, if you have at all attended to, and are any whit affected by that Representation that I have made to you, of the *Pains* of *Hell*, and of the *Joys* of *Heaven*, and of the *Eternity* of both; I should now dare to address my self to you, even tho' I thought you believed very little of these things; and methinks I should not doubt, but that I might prevail with you, and persuade you to Repentance, by these *Gospel Motives* of *Heaven* and *Hell*; even altho' the *Revelation* thereof were not certain and *undoubted*; altho' there were some just *Reason* to question the *Truth* of them.

For put the Case that it is very *uncertain* whether there will be an *eternal* Life or no; Nay, put the Case that it is ten to one, that it is much more probable, that there will not be any such Life after this; Yet when we consider what *Eternity* is, and what a vast *Difference* there is between living in perfect
 joy

joy, and in *everlasting Burning*; and when we consider withal the *Shortness* of this present Life; and how *little* we can lose in it by abstaining from Sin; and how *little* we can suffer in it, by the strictest Holiness and Virtue; even the bare *Possibility* that there will be an eternal Life, tho' we had no certain Revelation, and no other very good Assurance given us of it, would be abundantly *sufficient* to deterr us from Sin, and to stir us up to well-doing. For if we live well here, and there be really an eternal Life, it will be happy for us that we have made this Preparation for it; but if there should indeed be no other Life after this, we shall be then no Losers by what we have done; we shall be then in as good a Condition, as others will be in who did not believe it, nor live in Expectation of it; And all that Trouble which the Exercise of Piety and Virtue now costs us, is not worth speaking of; it is no more than we ought in Reason and Prudence to be at, altho' at the same time we believed it to be very uncertain whether there would be any such eternal Life or no.

Serm.

II.

For this is what we call and account Wisdom in all other Cases; *viz.* to provide not only against Certainties or high Probabilities, but (when it may easily and conveniently be done) even against *Possibilities* too. We reckon him an unwise Man for the World, who being in a good Way of getting, spends all as fast as it comes in, when he has no present Need to spend so much; and lays up nothing against old Age, when, if he lives to it, he will be past his Labour, and not in a

Serm. Capacity to get enough to support himself;
 II. And yet of all those that do wisely make some Provision for old Age, not one in ten perhaps lives to it. But nevertheless the bare Possibility that a Man may live to old Age, and the very great Inconveniencies that he will suffer, if he shall have nothing then to live upon, make it very adviseable for every one of the ten, to lay up somewhat, (if he can do it) against that time; And he, of the ten, whose only Lot it will be to live to be old, is not a wiser Man for making such Provision, than the other nine are, who yet, in the Event, will be never the better for their Labour.

Put case therefore that there is the same, or even a much greater Uncertainty whether there will be an eternal Life after this; yet when we consider *what an eternal Life is*; when we consider, that if there be a Heaven, and we can procure our Portion to be there; we shall be happy, infinitely and unspeakably happy, to eternal Ages; And that if there be a Hell, and we do not take Care to avoid it; our Lot will be extremely miserable, and we shall be *tormented Day and Night, for ever and ever, in the Lake that burns with Fire and Brimstone*: And when we consider withal, the very *little Trouble*, in Comparison, that it will cost us to attain *that* and to avoid *this*; that 'tis but the Labour of a few Years, and that the most we can suffer by it, is the Loss of a little Sensual Pleasure, for which after this Life is over, we should be never the better; or the enduring of some little Pain or Hardship which will be soon over, and for which, if no Good should ever come of it after this Life, we shall however be then

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II.

then never the worse; Considering, I say, thus the infinitely vast and wide Difference, that there is between being eternally happy and eternally miserable, 'tis enough that it is possible, 'tis more than enough, that 'tis probable that there will be such a state; and if we neglect to make Provision for it, because we are not *absolutely certain* that it will be, it is plain, that we do not act so prudently in this, as we do in other Cases that are of infinitely less Moment and Concern to us; and that (as our Saviour says) *The Children of this World, are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light.* Luke xvi. 8.

Now this is the most that the professed *Atheists* or *Infidels* can pretend; They'll say perhaps, that for their own parts, they do not believe the *Being* of a GOD, or a *Judgment*, or a *Life to come*; and that they do not see any *good Reason* to believe these things; forasmuch as all the Proofs that are brought for them, do, in their Judgment, fall short of Demonstration; and they are resolved not to believe them, till such Proof thereof shall be offered, as they can make no Exception against; not till they see with their own Eyes that there is a Heaven and a Hell, or till they shall have a Messenger sent to them from thence on purpose to assure them thereof. And be it so as they say, that there is not an absolute Certainty of the Truth of these things, that we have not yet such a sure Proof of them, as ocular or mathematical Demonstration would be; yet this is the most they can say, they themselves cannot pretend that there is any Demonstration on the other side. They are not sure, they say, that there will be *another Life*, or that it will be

ever.

Serm. *everlasting*; Well: but are they sure that there
 II. will not be such a Life? ~~is it~~ absurd or im-
 possible that there should be such a Life? this
 I'm sure they can't say: and all that they have
 yet dared to say, is only that those *Proofs*
 thereof, that we rely upon, are not, in their
 Opinion, *sufficient*.

But suppose them as *insufficient* as they can
 think them; yet still, if they are not *sufficient*
 to prove the *Certainty*, they may be *sufficient* to
 prove the *Probability* of what they are brought
 to prove; or if not so; yet still a future Life,
 if it be not *certain*, nay if it be not *probable*,
 however may be *possible*; And if it be only
possible that we may *live for ever*; and that
 we may be *eternally happy*, or *eternally misera-*
ble; this *Possibility* alone, (considering what an
 infinite Difference there is between these two
 States,) ought in reason to put us upon taking
 the best Care we can, that if there be an eter-
 nal Life, we may be eternally happy in it.

But after all, our Proof of this and other
 great Truths of our Religion, is not so very
 weak and slender as these Men would represent
 it; It is indeed as good as the Nature of the
 thing will bear; and he's an unreasonable Man
 that requires a better Proof of any thing than
 it is capable of.

This therefore is what I should now in the
 next Place, proceed to do; *viz.* (3.) To shew
 that there is *sufficient Reason* to give *Credit* to
 the *Scripture*, wherein these Truths are plainly
 taught. But this being too large a Subject to
 be handled now, I have already said, I would
 deferr it to the next Opportunity.

*The Sufficiency of the Scripture
Revelation;*

As to the Proof of it. PART I.

THE
Third SERMON,

Preach'd March 4th 1699.

St. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses
and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one
went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses
and the Prophets, neither will they be per-
swaded, though one rose from the dead.*

HAVING in my First Discourse on
these Words endeavoured to shew in
general, that a *Standing Revelation* of
God's Will may be so well contrived and so
well attested as to be sufficient to persuade Men to
Repentance if they are not unreasonably blind
and obstinate; I came the last time to consider
whether

Serm. whether *that Standing Revelation* which we have
 III. in the *Holy Scripture* be such a Revelation; Or
 whether there be not some particular *Defects*
 in it, which render it not so *sufficient* for this
 Purpose, as 'tis possible a *Standing Revelation*
 might be.

And if there be any such *Defect* in the *Holy Scripture*, it must be as I said, either in the *Matter* of it, or in the *Proof* of it; And if in the *Matter* of it, it must be, either that it does not give *sufficient Directions* what to do; Or that it does not propose *sufficient Motives* to persuade Men to do what it requires.

And therefore in speaking to this Head, I propounded to shew (1.) That the *Holy Scripture* gives us *sufficient Directions* what to do. (2.) That the *Motives* which it proposes are *sufficient* to persuade us to do what it requires: And (3.) That we have *sufficient Reason* given us, to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it.

And the Two first of these I have already done. I proceed now to the Third, *viz.*

(3.) To shew that we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it; And that I shall presume to be *sufficient Reason* in this Case, which we readily accept and allow of as *sufficient* in all other Cases of the like Nature.

And I suppose it will be granted that we have *sufficient Proof* given us of the *Truth* of the Things contained in *Holy Scripture*, and of the *Authority* of it, if it can be shewn, 1. That
 we

we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books of Holy Scripture* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof.

2. That there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to them in their *Relation* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded. And

3. That if the *Matters of Fact* recorded in the *Scripture* are true, they are *sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and divine *Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught.

These things therefore I shall now endeavour to make good.

But in speaking to this Point, I shall (for Brevity's sake) confine my Discourse only to the *Books* of the *New Testament*; Partly, because these are the *Books* wherein our *Christian Religion* is chiefly taught; And especially because I think there are none who receive the *New Testament* as of *divine Authority*, that do (or indeed can, with any Reason) reject the *Old*.

1. Then, I am to shew that we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books of Holy Scripture*, (of the *New Testament* in particular) were written by those *Persons* that are said to be the *Authors* thereof.

This indeed is a Point that it does not properly lie upon us to make any Proof of; For as a Man's *Possession* of an *Estate*, is alone a good and a *sufficient Title* to it, till a better is shewn by the Person that endeavours to eject him: so it is here; These *Books* are generally receiv'd as written by such and such *Persons*; These *Authors* have the *Name*, these have (as it were) the *Possession* of them; and that's Title enough, if no other could be produced, so long

Serm. long as no Evidence is offered to shew that a
 III. any other Persons have a better Title to them.
 It lies on them therefore who *deny* that the
Books are *theirs*, to give a Reason of what they
 say; either by alledging some *special Matter*
 out of the *Books* themselves, whereby it may
 be proved that they could not be of *their* Wri-
 ting; or by producing some credible and au-
 thentick *History* testifying that they were writ-
 ten by some other Persons, and not by them.
 And till they can, and shall do this, (which I
 am persuaded can never be done) we may ve-
 ry well refuse to produce any positive Evidence
 to affirm or prove their Title, their *Possession*
 being a good Title enough, till a better appears.
 And a Tenant might with as good Reason re-
 fuse to pay Rent to the Person, of whom he
 took the Estate, and to whom he hath ever hi-
 therto Paid Rent, and whose Right to it is not
 at all controverted, until he shall suffer his Wri-
 tings to be perused and examined, and by them
 make it plainly appear that he is the *lawful*
 Landlord; as any Man can now refuse to give
 that Credit to *these Books*, as written by the
Apostles, which has been given hitherto, and is
 still given by all *Christians*, unless he may have
 now as good positive Evidence of their being
 written by the *Apostles*, as might have been
 given thereof at first, and as, it may be pre-
 sumed, was given before their Title to them
 was so universally acknowledged.

But nevertheless what a Man is not under
 any Obligation to do for the asserting of his
 Right, he may do wisely enough for his own
 Satisfaction. And it must needs be a Satisfa-
 ction and Pleasure to a Man, altho' his Title
 to

to his Estate be not at present controverted, if in looking over the Writings and Evidences of it, he sees plainly how it descended to him by a lineal Succession from Father to Son for many Generations past; and how it came at first to his Ancestors, by a clear and fair Purchase from the former Possessors; or by Donation from the Prince, in the Division of a wast or conquered Country; and if he also finds ancient *Terrars* agreeing in the same Measure, and Boundings, and exactly describing the same Estate which he now possesses; and if moreover, looking far back, he sees, that upon some Disputes or Law-suits that have formerly been concerning it, Judgment has been always given on his Side. It cannot but please him, I say, that upon such a Search into Antiquity, he finds that he is so very well provided to make out his Title, if there should ever be any Occasion for it; altho' by Reason of the long and quiet *Possession*, that he, and his Ancestors before him, time out of Mind, have had of it, he has no just Cause to fear he shall ever meet with any Disturbance.

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And so it is here: These Writings, the Books of the *New Testament*, are generally acknowledged to be written by the *Apostles of Christ*, and their Authority is at present uncontested; It may therefore reasonably be presumed, (especially by those who have not Parts or Learning or Leisure to examine into the Reasons of of such things,) that they would not have been so universally acknowledged and revered as they are upon this Account, but upon very good Grounds; tho' what the Grounds thereof are, they have not yet inquired; Their being

in

Serm. in *Possession* is alone Reason enough to acknowledge and assert their Title. It lies upon them
 III. that *deny* these *Books* to be *theirs*, to produce satisfactory *Evidence* of their being *forged* or *counterfeit*; and till they shall produce some Evidence thereof that has a shew and Appearance of Truth, we have no Reason to be staggered in our Belief by their bare, however bold and confident, Denial of their Authority; And much less shall we need to give our Reasons for our receiving them as written by the *Apostles*, till our Adversaries shall offer some Reasons why we ought not to receive them as such.

But nevertheless, because we see there are some, in this incredulous Age, that shew a good Will to deny the Authority of these *Sacred Books*; and whose Interest it would be to prove them *Spurious*; and because we cannot tell what unwarrantable Practices their Inclination and Interest may put them upon; nor what Writings or Evidences, plausibly forged and counterfeited, they may hereafter produce: it cannot be amiss for us to inquire and see; and it cannot but be a Pleasure and Satisfaction to us (who hold our Hope of eternal Life chiefly by these Writings) to find and consider how well provided we are to detect and disprove any such Forgeries, if they should be offered, by being able to produce, in Opposition thereto, as good positive Proof that these *Books* are *genuine*, as such a Matter is capable of, much better than I believe can be produced for the Authority of any other Books of the like Antiquity.

And

And it gives us *some Satisfaction* in the Belief we have been bred up in, that *these* are the *genuine Books* of the *Authors* to whom they are ascribed, to find that they are received as such, not by a small Party of Men, not by that Church and Nation only to which we belong, but by *all Christians* dispersed in *all Parts* of the World; and likewise that they *all* agree with us in the same Testimony, *viz.* that they received them as such, from their Fathers. For that *these Books* should be thus generally receiv'd and acknowledged, by so many different and far distant Nations, without some good Grounds, is not conceivable; because it can neither be imagined that the *Christians* of the *present Age* dispersed in all Countries, should *combine* together to say that they receiv'd *these Books* from their Fathers, as the *genuine Writings* of the *Apostles*, if they had not so receiv'd them; nor that their *Forefathers*, in any of the *Ages* past, should have all agreed together, to put a *Cheat* upon their *Posterity*, by delivering down to them *these Books* as written by the *Apostles*, when they themselves had no good Reason to believe them so, or when they knew the contrary.

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It is a *further Satisfaction* to us, to observe and consider, that the *Authority* of *these Books* is as well proved as it can be, not only by *oral*, but also by the best *written Tradition*; The *Christian Writers* of all *Ages*, citing them (as they had Occasion) as the *genuine Writings* of the *Apostles*; And that, as well before the *Canon* of the *New Testament* was defined and declared by *Councils*, as since.

Serm. And lastly, It gives us very good *Satisfaction*
 III. that *these Books* are the *genuine Writings* of the
 Persons to whom they are ascribed, that we
 do not find they were ever *excepted* against,
 as *spurious* and *counterfeit*, in *those times* when
 it would have been most proper to have made
 the Exception ; and by *those Persons* whose
 Cause and Interest it would have served very
 much to have proved them *Spurious*, if it
 could have been done.

For the proper *time* to have made this *Ex-
 ception* to *these Writings*, was *when*, or *soon af-
 ter*, they were first published ; when it would
 have been easie to have proved them *Spurious*
 if they had been so ; and no less easie to have
 brought positive Evidence of their being *Ge-
 nuine*, if indeed they were *Genuine*, either
 by the living Testimony of the Authors them-
 selves, or of others that knew their Writing;
 or by producing the original Copies under
 their own Hands. And therefore *their* being
then received as the *Writings* of the *Apostles*,
 by *those* who were best able to know whose
 Writings they were ; and their being *not* (for
 ought appears) *excepted* against, upon this Ac-
 count, at *that time*, is a very good Argument that
 there was no just Ground for any such Exception.

And the most *likely Persons*, they whose
 Cause and Interest it would have served most,
 to deny that *these Books* were written by the
 reputed *Authors* thereof, were the Enemies of
 our Religion, The *Jews*, or the *Heathens* ;
 who neither of them wanted either Malice
 or Wit, to alledge any Fact that they could
 have justified the Truth of, in Disproof of the
 Christian Religion. It is therefore no small
Satisfaction

Satisfaction to us to observe, that *they* never argued against the *Christian Religion* from this Topic; that *they* never denied that the *Books* which the *Christians* received as written by the *Apostles* were *genuine*; Nay, that *Julian* himself, one of the subt'lest, as well as of the bitterest Adversaries of the *Christian Faith*, did yet expressly own that the *Books* received by the *Christians*, as the Books of *Peter, Paul, Matthew, Mark* and *Luke*, were indeed *theirs*.

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After all indeed it must be owned that we have not such Demonstration that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by the *Apostles*, as is self-evident, and cannot possibly be contradicted; for the Matter it self is not capable of such Demonstration. But we have such Demonstration of it as cannot be contradicted with any Reason; We have as good Assurance of it as we have, or can have, of any Matter of that kind; We have as good Evidence of the Truth of it, as, supposing it to be true, we could have of it; and more than this cannot be desired. We are as *morally certain* that *these Books* were written by the *Authors* to whom they are ascribed, as we are that any other ancient Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; There being no Argument, by which it is, or can be proved, that any ancient Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it, which does not prove the Authority of *these Books*, rather more strongly, than it does the Authority of any other Book; And there being no Argument that is, or can be urged, against the Authority of *these Books*, which may not, with

Serm. as good Reason, be urged, to disprove the
 III. Authority of any other Book of the like Antiquity ; nay indeed, of all the Books in the World, ancient or modern, the Authors of which are not now living, or of whose Writing the Books ascribed to them no living Evidence can be produced.

For what is there that can by said to disprove, or to render suspected the Authority of these Books, but only that there is a Possibility that Things may not be as we believe them to be ? It *may be*, (the *Atheist*, or *Infidel* will say) that these Books were *not written* by the *Persons* under whose Names we receive them, but by some others ; It *may be*, (he'll say, for Instance :) that there never was such a Man as *Matthew the Publican*, afterwards an *Apostle of Christ* ; Or if there was, yet, it *may be*, that the *Gospel* that goes under his Name was *not of his Writing*, but is a Book of a much later Date ; It *may be*, that it was written by some *crafty Priest*, no longer ago than the *last Age* ; And that he and some others in Confederacy with him, at the same Time that they forged this *Gospel* in the *Greek Tongue*, did likewise make and contrive all those *Translations* of it into several Languages that are now extant, some of which pretend to very great Antiquity, and which are all made with such an Appearance of Truth, and with such Congruity to the several Times in which they are said to be made, that none of the Learned Men of the present Age have been able to discover the Fraud ; And, It *may be* also, that when they forged the *Gospel* it self, they forged likewise all the
 other

Serm.
III.

other Books, that are pretended to be written by several *Historians* and *Divines*, in divers Languages, and in several Ages of the World for Sixteen Hundred Years past, in which this *Gospel* is either testified to be written by *St. Matthew*, or is cited or commented upon as *his*; And it *may be* likewise that at the same Time, that they trumped up all these Books in one Countrey, they had their Confederates and Correspondents that did the same in all the other Countries where they are now found; not only exposing them to publick Sale as Books of ancient Date and venerable Antiquity, but likewise sily conveying an infinite Number of Written and Printed Copies of the same into all *Libraries*, both publick and private, unknown to the *Keepers* and *Owners* thereof; And it *may be* that all these things were done so *secretly*, that none of the Confederacy did ever confess, nor any besides ever discover the Cheat; And it *may be* that all the rest of the World was so much *asleep* at that time, as to have no Suspicion of what was done, nor any Sense of that great Alteration that had been made in the World by these Books; nor any Remembrance, afterwards, when they awoke and found themselves *Christians*, that they had been of some other Religion before, when they were first taken with that *Lethargick Fit*.

But if things *may be*, what is there of this kind that *may not be*? If the World be so much mistaken in this Matter, it may be as much mistaken in any other Matter of the like Nature. And then, It *may be*, that there never was such a Man as *Homer*, or *Virgil*, or *Cesar*,

Serm. *Cesar, or Cicero, or Plutarch, or any other of*
 III. those Persons, as whose Writings we now receive the Books that go under their Names; but that all the Books pretended to be written by those Authors, and likewise all the Books of later Date, whereby the Authority of those former Books is attested, were in like Manner contrived, and made and dispersed, by such another Gang of crafty and designing Knaves who took a Pleasure in abusing the rest of the World, or hoped to make a Gain to themselves thereby.

Nay then (for why should we stop here?) It *may be*, that not only the *Laws* of our Religion, but the *Laws* of our Civil State too, are all *forged and counterfeit*; It *may be*, that once upon a time, the *Keeper* of the *Publick Records*, having by much and long Observation attained to good Skill in the ancient Ways of Writing for many Ages backward, and being a compleat Master of his Pen, and having also gotten an Art to make a fresh Writing seem just as old as he had a Mind it should be thought to be, did compose, and deposite in their proper Places, those *Original Acts* of *Parliament* which are now taken to be the *Laws* of some of our former *Kings*; and that to confirm and establish his Fraud, he procured some other Persons at the same Time to Write or Print, and to convey into all *Shops* and *Libraries*, several Books of *Reports* and *Pleadings*, wherein these counterfeit *Acts* were cited and referred to; and it *may be* that while as this was doing, none else had their Eyes open to see it, nor had ever after the least Suspicion of what was done; Or if they had, yet that they

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they were so well pleased with the Cheat, (which they thought would be a good Means of preserving Peace and Justice in the Nation) as to be willing it should pass to Posterity undiscovered. These *May be's* are I am sure every whit as possible and as likely as the other.

Either therefore let those Men who upon this Account doubt of the Authority of the *Books* of the *New Testament*; Or who would make others doubt of it, only by suggesting that it is a thing *possible* in Nature, that they *may be* all *forged* and *counterfeit*, (let them, I say, either) entertain and suggest the same Doubt concerning all other ancient Books, of the Antiquity and Authority of which there is not greater Evidence than there is of these; And then they will render themselves so justly ridiculous to the World that there will be no Need to expose their Folly; for then they must call in Question the Authority of all Books and the Truth of all History: Or else let them fairly own that the true Reason of their making a Doubt concerning *these Books* rather than concerning *others*, is because they do not relish the Matter of them; because they find it easier to *resist* that strong Evidence that is given of the *Authority* of *these Books* than they do to govern their Lives according to those strict Rules of Holiness and Purity that are therein prescribed, and to bring their Wills to the *Obedience* of Faith. And if they will but own this, (which I believe is the Truth) their Prejudice and Partiality will be so evident to all, that it may be reasonably hoped their impious Suggestions

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will do but little Harm in the World ; and that few Men of any Sense or Reason will be so fool-hardy as to venture their Souls and run the Hazard of a miserable Eternity, upon so many, and such very improbable (I had almost said, such impossible) *may be's* as must be supposed to have been, if indeed *these Books* are forged and counterfeit, if indeed they were not written by those *Persons* whom they are commonly ascribed to.

But yielding this Point (may the *Atheist* or *Infidel* farther say) *viz.* that the Gospel called St. Matthew's was written by St. Matthew, and that of St. Mark by St. Mark, and the Rest of the Books which are ascribed to any other certain Authors, by those Persons to whom they are severally ascribed ; yet the Authority of the whole *New Testament* will not, by this Concession, be sufficiently established. For of some Books of the *New Testament* the Authors are not known, of others they are doubted ; Some Parts of this Book that are now received have been rejected in ancient Times, and others not universally receiv'd. And besides, 'tis certain that in the early Times of Christianity there were several Counterfeit Gospels and Epistles, some of which may possibly have slipped into the Canon unawares. And lastly, If it be granted that all the Books of the *New Testament* were originally written by the Apostles or other Inspired Men, yet however the Books that we now have are but Copies, in which many Alterations may have been made by designing Men, or careless Transcribers.

These

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These Objections (or Cavils rather, for such I am sure they would be accounted in any other Case) against the Authority of these Sacred Books have been urged by some Men both anciently and lately; But they have been also so well and fully answered by those learned Persons that have written in Defence of the *Canon*, that I once thought to have taken no Notice of them, and I believe had not done it, but that I considered on the other Hand, that when an old Objection that has been answered an Hundred Times is urged afresh, a great many may take it for a new one, and if it be not quickly answered, may be apt to think it unanswerable; so that in this Case it may be better to repeat the same Answer (if it be a good one) that has been often formerly made to it, than to say nothing. And besides, in this degenerate Age, in which any wild or Atheistical Discourse passes for Wit, it may be the Hap of some Persons, who have not much Mind or Leisure, or Opportunity to read Books, to hear these things in Conversation, and not knowing readily what Answers to make to them, to be somewhat staggered in their Belief thereby; Especially if they be such whose loose and licentious Way of Living makes them easie to receive, without Examination, any Notions that may give them Ease or Encouragement in Sin.

For these Reasons therefore I thought it would not be amiss, (especially because it is a Matter properly belonging to the Subject I am now upon, and because I have some time left for it) to mention, as briefly as may

Serm. may be, the Answers that have been usually
 III. given to these Objections.

And, 1. Whereas 'tis said, that of *some* of the Books of the *New Testament* the Authors Names are not certainly known (as namely of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*) and that of others, the Authors have been doubted, (particularly, of the *second* and *third Epistles* of *St. John*.) To this it hath been answered,

1. That the Credit and Authority of a Book depends many times much more upon the good Assurance that we have of the *time* when it was written, and of the *Character* of the Person that wrote it, than upon the certain Knowledge of his *Name*. It is therefore a Matter of no great Consequence whether the *Epistle to the Hebrews* was written by *St. Paul* himself (as is commonly, and upon very probable Grounds, believed;) Or (as some have conjectured) by *St. Luke* his constant Companion; Or (as others) by *St. Clement* his Fellow-labourer whose Name was in the *Book of Life*; Or (as others) by *St. Barnabas* his Assistant in Preaching the Gospel, and who is dignified by *St. Luke* with the Title of an *Apostle*. And so, neither is it very material whether the *Epistles* called the *second* and *third Epistles* of *St. John*, and commonly believed to be written by the same Person that wrote the first, were indeed written by *St. John* the *Apostle* and *Evangelist*, or (as some have thought) by another *John*, who was made Bishop of the *Jewish Christians* at *Ephesus*, by him; For it is sufficient that the Writers of these Books, (which soever they were of the Persons before-mentioned) were of

Phil. iv. 3.

Acts xiv. 7.

of good Ability and Integrity, and well instructed in that Doctrine and Religion which they wrote about; And of this, besides the Testimony of the Ancients, there is good Evidence enough in the Writings themselves.

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2. In Answer to this, and all other Objections of this sort, against *these*, or any other Books, or Chapters, or Paragraphs of the *New Testament*, it hath been farther truly said, that there is nothing *singular* in *these Books*; that there is no Doctrine of Christianity taught in any Part of the *New Testament*, of the Author or Authority of which there hath ever been any Doubt in the Church, which is not taught in some other undoubted and uncontroverted Part of the same Book. So that if it were granted that those Parts of the *New Testament*, of which there has been formerly any Doubt were still of uncertain Authority, our Christianity would suffer no real Loss thereby; Only giving up these controverted Places we should sometimes want a good help to enable us to understand readily those other uncontroverted Places of the *New Testament*, wherein the same Doctrines are (but perhaps more briefly or obscurely) delivered.

2. Whereas 'tis said that *some Parts* of the *New Testament* have been *rejected* in ancient Times; This is granted. But then it hath been shewn, that, considering by *whom* they have been rejected, and under what *Notion* and for what *Reasons* they were rejected, this Objection is of no force to invalidate the Authority even of *those Parts* of the *New Testament* which have been so rejected, and much less of the

Serm. the rest of the Book which has been allowed by
 III. all.

Thus, *some Portions* of the *New Testament* have been rejected by *Hereticks*, because they contradicted their private and singular *No-*
tions; Some by *Judaizing Christians*, as the *Two*
first Chapters of *St. Matthew*, because they were
 not found in that *Hebrew Copy* of that *Gospel*
 which they used; and all the *Epistles* of *St.*
Paul were likewise rejected by the *same Per-*
sons; but not, as *not* written by *St Paul*, but
 only because they were written by *him*, whom
 they looked upon as an *Enemy* to their *Nation*,
 because he levelled them with other *Nations*,
 and as too averse to that *Religion* which had
 been introduced by *Moses*, which they conti-
 nued so wedded to, even after their embracing
Christianity, that they could not but suspect
 him to be a *false Apostle* who had so plainly
 taught the *Abrogation* thereof. And for the
 like *Reasons some other Parts* of the *New Te-*
stament have been likewise rejected by some few
Men; that is, not because they wanted the same
Attestation which the other *Parts* of it had,
 or because it appeared by credible *History* that
 they were *Spurious*, but only because they con-
 tradicted too plainly some *Notions* which their
 former *Prejudices* or *Education* had made them
 fond of. So that this *Argument* against the
Authority of the *New Testament*, taken from the
Rejection of some *Parts* of it, by some particular
Men or *Seets*, is manifestly of no *Strength*, un-
 less there was some *good Reason* for their *Re-*
jecting them; And that there was *good Reason* for
 it, has not yet been shewn; but the contrary
 has been shewn very plainly by the *ancient Wri-*

ters, of the Church, in several Books, (written by them in Confutation of those *Sects* and *Heresies*) which are still extant.

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And 3. Whereas it is further said, that *some Books* which are now receiv'd as *Parts* of the *New Testament*, were not *universally* receiv'd in the most early Times, when their Authority (if they were authentick) might have been asserted upon more certain Grounds than it can be now; viz. the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews*, the *Epistle* of *St. James*, the 2d. of *St. Peter*, the 2d. and 3d. of *St. John*, the *Epistle* of *St. Jude*, and the *Book* of the *Revelation*: This is likewise granted. But in Answer to it, it is said;

1. That there is good Evidence from Antiquity, that these *controverted Books*, were receiv'd in the most early Times, by those who had the best Opportunity of satisfying themselves of the Authors and Authority thereof, viz. by those to whom they were sent, and in general by the whole *Greek Church*.

2. That it is no Wonder, that these *Books* (being written either to *Christians dispersed*, and consequently only published by giving out Copies thereof to some, to be communicated, as there was Opportunity, to others; or else to *private Persons*, living perhaps at great Distance from the Places from which they were sent) were not so easie to be attested, and upon that Account were not at first so generally receiv'd, as the others were, which were either written to particular Churches, to which the Authors Hands, and the Messengers that brought them were well known; or which were first published and received in the same Places where they were written. And,

3. That

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3. That even *those Churches* which did for some time *doubt* of the Authority of *these Books*, were persuaded at last to receive them as the *Authentick Writings* of the *Apostles*, or other Inspired Men. If therefore it be supposed, that while they doubted of *these Books*, they had *Reason* for their Doubt; that is, that they did it, because they were not as yet fully satisfied that they were *Apostolical Writings*, (which the Objectors, I believe, will readily enough grant) it may be very reasonably presumed, that they had afterwards *greater Reason* to lay aside their Doubt; and that when they did receive them, it was, because there had been then lately such Evidence and Attestation given of their being written by the *Apostles* or other Inspired Men as they had not heard of before, such as they could not then, with any Reason, contradict or gainsay. For ordinarily a less Reason will persuade a Man to take up an Opinion at first, than will persuade him to go back from an Opinion (how weakly soever grounded) which he has before embraced and defended. So that this Objection is so far from lessening, that it rather strengthens the Proof we have of the Authority even of *these once controverted Books*; And it is, besides, a very good corroborating Evidence of the Authority of *all the other Books* of the *New Testament*. For the *Backwardness* of some Churches to receive *these controverted Books* at first, (when they had nothing to object to the Matter of them) makes it evident, that the *Christians* of the first Ages were not so very easie and credulous as some have represented them; that they did not so very greedily swallow any Book for divine Revelation

that

that contained a great many Miracles, mixed with a few good Morals, without making due Enquiry concerning the Author and Authority thereof. But on the contrary, their being so hard to be persuaded to receive *these controverted Books* for some time, while they wanted, as they thought, sufficient Attestation, (altho' the Doctrine of them was in all Points agreeable to the Doctrine of the other Books which they had before received; their being so hard, I say, to receive *these Books*) of the Authority of which there nevertheless really was such Evidence, as they themselves, after having well weighed and considered it, declared themselves satisfied with, gives very good Ground to believe, that they had from the Beginning, such Evidence as was without Exception of the Authority of *all those other Books* (that is, of much the greatest Part) of the *New Testament*, which were never controverted, which were from the first, and with universal Consent receiv'd by all Christian Churches; For if there had not been very undeniable Evidence of *their* being the *genuine* Writings of the *Apostles* or other *inspired Men*, there would certainly have been the same Doubt and Controversie concerning *them*, that there once was concerning *these*.

But, 4. It hath been further objected, that in the early Times of Christianity, there were several *counterfeit Gospels* and *Epistles*, which passed among some for the *Writings* of the *Apostles*; and that 'tis possible some of them may have slipped into the *Canon*, unawares to the *first Christians*, who, by all the Accounts of those Times, were more remarkable for their

Honesty

Serm.
III.

Serm. *Honesty and Simplicity and Zeal, than for their*
 III. *extraordinary Parts and Learning.*

But this Objection, (granting the Matter of Fact alledg'd in it to be true) is so far from lessening, that it rather adds to that reasonable Assurance that we have, that all the Books of the Canon are true and genuine. For there is nothing so apt to put Men upon using Caution, as a great Probability of being cheated if they be not cautious. Thus, when the Coin is generally good, and there is very little base or counterfeit Money stirring, Men commonly take it by Tale, without examining the Weight and Purity of every Piece; and so may more easily have a single Piece of lighter Weight or baser Metal put upon them without discerning it: But if the Coin be much corrupted, they look more narrowly upon every single Piece of Money that they take, and if there be the least Cause to suspect it, make Trial of it by the Scale or Touchstone, before they accept it as good. If therefore there were in the early Times of Christianity, many counterfeit Pieces given out, and perhaps receiv'd by some, as written by the Apostles, and which were, some of them, discovered to be *spurious*; (and there is not greater Evidence from Antiquity, that there were any such *spurious Writings*, than there is that the *Spuriousness* of some of them was soon discern'd;) this could not but put the Christians of those Times upon examining more strictly, what Evidence and Attestation there was that those other Books were true and genuine which had been generally receiv'd as such. So that the more there were of these *spurious and counterfeit Books*, so much the more assured

assured and confident we may reasonably be, that none but such as were *undoubtedly true* and *authentick*, and very well *attested*, were admitted into the *Canon*; And, of the two, it is much more probable, that they did, for Want of *clear Attestation*, refuse to admit some Books that had been written by the *Apostles*, than that they did, without *sufficient Attestation*, admit any that were not.

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And that the *Christians* of those early Times (who had the best Means and Opportunities of satisfying themselves whether any Book, given out as written by an *Apostle*, was so or not) wanted not Skill to *discern* between a *true* and a *spurious* Writing; (as is maliciously suggested by some Men) is abundantly evident, from those *Monuments* of the excellent Parts and Learning of *some* of the first *Converts* to *Christianity*, which are still extant in their Books; and from the Testimony that is therein given to the like good Ability of several others, who were famous in their Generation, for their Preaching and Writings, and for their stoutly maintaining the Truths of Christianity both against *Infidels* and *Hereticks*, but whose Books are now unhappily lost.

But 5. and lastly; It was further said, That tho' it be granted that *all* the *Books* of the *New Testament* that are now receiv'd, were originally written by the *Apostles* or other *inspired Men*, yet *those* which we now have are but *Copies*; in which, by so many *Transcriptions* thereof as must have been in about Fourteen Hundred Years, many *Alterations* may have happened, thro' the *Ignorance*, or

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Oversight,

Serm. *Oversight, or evil Design of the Transcribers;*
 III. And that several *Changes* have been made, is undeniably plain, by the *various Readings* that have been observed in comparing the best *Manuscript Copies*, that are now, or have been extant since Printing began; So that we cannot be sure whether any particular *Passages* now found in *these Books*, are the very *Words* of an *Apostle*, or of some ignorant or careless *Scribe*. But to this it hath been answered;

1. That so far as this Objection is of any Force, it invalidates the Credit of all History, and of all other Books of ancient Date, as well as of the *New Testament*; Nay, indeed of all other Books, much more than of *this*; for the *faithfully Transcribing* whereof, it may reasonably be presumed, there was formerly greater Care taken, (as there is now for the *correctly Printing* it) than there ordinarily was of other Books, that were of less Consequence.

2. That tho' it be certain that some *Hereticks* have attempted to corrupt the *Text* of the *New Testament* in some Places, and have made Changes in some *few Copies* thereof; it is almost as certain that their Attempts of this kind neither have nor ever could amount to a Corruption of *all the Copies* thereof that were generally in Mens Hands; In which there is even to this Day an admirable *Agreement* in all Matters of Moment. And from that general Agreement that always was in *all the Copies* of this Book, (except those *few* that were sometimes corrupted by *Hereticks*, to serve a Turn) their Attempts
 of

of this kind have been always rendred successful; and those false Doctrines, that were justified only by their own false Copies of this Book, solidly confuted.

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3. It is further answered, that not only there is no Evidence that there has been, but that 'tis morally impossible that there should have been a *general Depravation* of the Copies of *this Book*, either designedly, or by Chance, in *any Place* of great *Consequence* either in *Point of History* or *Doctrine*. For *when* was it possible that this Corruption should be? Was it in the Copies that were given out, in the Days of the *Apostles*, and while they were *living*? This can't well be supposed; Or if it had been done *then*, it can't be thought but that the *Authors* of these *Books*, being *living*, would have taken Care to have had such false Copies of their Books suppressed, or well corrected; or at least have given publick Notice, in order to their Correction, of those Faults that had been committed in the Transcribing, which did either obscure or spoil their Sense.

Was it then in the *Times* immediately after the *Apostles* were *dead*? But neither could this be; for by this Time an infinite Number of true Copies had been made and dispersed in all Parts of the *Christian Church*; And besides the *Autographs* of the Books themselves were then probably, *all* in being; For *Tertullian* who lived in the Third Century, witnesses that some of them were extant and to be seen even in his Time; So that by comparing the *new false Copies* with the *ancient true ones*, or with the *Originals* themselves

Serm. selves then extant, the Fraud would have been
 III. quickly discovered, or the Mistake easily re-
 ~~~~~~ctified.

Was it then in the *Times after this*, when the *Originals* were *lost* or *worn out*? This was still less possible; For by this Time not only a greater Number of true Copies thereof, in the *Original Greek*, were *dispersed* and in the Hands of all *Christians*; but several *Translations* thereof had been likewise made into other *Languages*, several *Commentaries* had been written thereupon, and the most *material Passages* thereof had been, occasionally, *cited* by the *Christian Writers* of those or the foregoing *Times*.

And the further we go on downwards, 'twas still (for such Reasons as have been given already) more impossible that the Copies of this Book should be *generally corrupted* in any *Place* or *Matter of Moment*; as well as more likely that there should be every Day an *Increase* of such *small and literal Mistakes*, as could hardly be avoided by the greatest Care and Faithfulness. And these are the *Various Readings* before spoken of; Concerning which, and in Answer to the before-mentioned Objection, so far as it is grounded upon them, it is farther said—

4. In the fourth Place; That *they* are no other than such as are to be met with in Comparing the *Manuscripts* of all other Books; That these *various Readings* (if they be compared together with Judgment) are more like to lead us to understand the true Meaning of the Writers, than to endanger our mistaking their Sense; it being very probable that

when

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when there are *several Readings*, one of them is the *right*, and easier by their Help, to rectify the Mistakes that may have been made in some Copies, than it would have been, if all Copies had agreed in the same Mistake. And lastly, that it is, hardly in any Place of which there are such *various Readings*, very material which is the true Reading; there being no Point that is of the *Substance* either of the *History* or *Doctrine* of Christianity, that is grounded upon any *Text*, of which there are, in different Copies, *various Readings*, but which may be proved by some *other Texts*, in the Reading whereof all Copies do agree.

5. And Lastly, In Answer to this Objection; that the *Text* of the *New Testament* is depraved and *corrupted*, and consequently of uncertain Authority, it is further said; That supposing these Books to be written by the *Apostles*, and by *divine Direction* and *Inspiration*, (which must be supposed, or at least, for Argument sake, be allow'd by those that make this Objection; Or else the Objection is trifling) it is by no Means credible that the same *Goodness* of GOD which took Care for the Writing, has not likewise taken Care for the *preserving* of these Books, so *free* (at least) from *Corruption*, that they may be *sufficient* to answer the Ends for which they were written; that is, fully to instruct Men in all Points of *Christian Faith* and Practice, to *make them wise unto Salvation*, and *thoroughly to furnish them unto all good Works*.

And now from all that hath been said, I hope it appears, that we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of the *New Testament*



Serm. were Written by those *Persons* whose *Names*  
 III. they bear, or to whom they are ascribed, viz.  
 by the *Apostles* of *Christ*, or other inspired  
 Men; Which was the *first* thing I was to make  
 good.

Whether there be *sufficient Reason* to give  
 them Credit in the *Matters* of *Fact* which they  
 have related; and whether the *Doctrine* of the  
*Gospel* be well proved by the *History* of it,  
 shall (GOD willing) be hereafter enquired.

Serm. IV,  
 V, VI.

In the mean Time (supposing their Testi-  
 mony to be credible) what has been said up-  
 on this first Head may serve to shew, in some  
 Measure, the Unreasonableness of those Men,  
 who are not satisfied with the *Scripture Reve-*  
*lation.*

For I believe there are few that have heard  
 any thing of the *Manner* of the first Preaching  
 of the *Gospel*, but who think, that they that  
 lived in those Times, and heard the *Apostles*  
*themselves*, had *sufficient Reason* to receive their  
 Testimony; And this (perhaps they'll say)  
 is what they could wish for themselves; viz.  
 That they might have heard the *Apostles them-*  
*selves*; or that they might *now* have as good  
 and sure Grounds of Faith as those had who  
 were converted to Christianity by the Preach-  
 ing of the *Apostles*; which if they had, they  
 make no Doubt but they should be, *not only*  
*almost, but altogether such*, as the *Primitive Chri-*  
*stians* were, both in Belief and Practice.

But if they are not *such* now, 'tis much to  
 be doubted whether they would have been *such*  
 if they had lived then. For by what has been  
 now said it appears, that the *Books* of the *New*  
*Testament*, being (as we have very good Reason

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son to believe they were) written by the *Apostles* themselves, are *their Words*; *their Sermons*; that therein the *Apostles* themselves *being dead, do yet truly speak* to us, the very same things, tho' not just in the same Manner, that they spake before while they were living; and that their *Testimony written*, if indeed it be *theirs*, (which I have shewn there is no Cause to doubt of) is as credible as their *living Testimony* was.

For in *Matters of common Testimony* we make little Difference between *Speech* and *Writing*; If a Man whom we dare trust sends us a *Letter*, and therein relates such and such things, as heard or seen by himself, or as well attested to him by unexceptionable Witnesses, we give as full Credit to his *Letter* as we should do to his *Words*.

So that in Truth, *our Case*, who live now, is not very different from *theirs* who lived in the *Apostles Days*, and *heard* them *saying* those same Things, which we now *read* in their *Books*; and if we think those inexcuseable who did not receive their Testimony when given by *Word of Mouth*, we can't in good Reason, hold our selves excused, if we receive not the same Testimony of the same Persons given *under their Hands*.

In one Respect indeed, it must be granted, that *they* had the Advantage of *us*; viz. because they might be *surer* that they heard an *Apostle speak*, than the Nature of the Thing will admit *we* should be, that we *read* the *Words* of an *Apostle, written*; But we are sure enough of this; We have as good *moral Certainty* of it, as we can have of any thing, that is not capa-

Serm.

III.



ble of any other than a *moral Certainty*: And if the *Words* that we read in the *New Testament* are the *Words* of the *Apostles of Christ*, we have, in some Respects, the Advantage of *those* who lived in those early Times; for we have the *concurrent Testimony* of *several* of the *Apostles*, written; whereas hardly any in those times, (when a few Persons were to bear Witness to all the World) could have more than the Testimony of one *single Apostle* only, by *Word of Mouth*; and *many* Witnesses are more credible than *one*. And besides, there being *several* Witnesses, their Testimony if it be false, may be more easily proved so, by their *Disagreement* with one another, than the Testimony of one single Witness could be. And lastly, a *Writing*, which we may review, and read over as often as we will, and which we may take what time we please to consider of, may be more thoroughly understood, and better digested than a *Sermon* or *Discourse* only *once spoken* can well be.

But if it be granted that the *Faith* of the *first Converts* to *Christianity*, which came by *Hearing* of the *Apostles*, might be built upon more *certain* and *infallible* Grounds, than *ours*, that comes only by *Reading*, is; (And some

Serm. VII.

Reasons may perhaps be given hereafter, why 'twas fit it should be so) it is enough, however, to render our Infidelity inexcusable, if the *Grounds* of *Faith* that we now have, are very *rational*, if they are a *sufficient* Support for such a *Faith* as will enable us to please *GOD*, and to overcome the *World*.

And this may be farther said for our Comfort, and to make us easie and satisfied with those *Grounds* and *Reasons* of *Faith*, which are afforded



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III.

afforded to us by the *written* Testimony of the *Apostles* in the *Books* of the *New Testament*; that as there is *more Certainty* in that *Belief*, (if it may be called *Belief*) which is grounded upon *Demonstration*, or *infallible Evidence*; so there is *more Praise* and *Vertue* in that good *Disposition* of *Mind*, which makes us rest satisfied with *such Grounds* of *Faith*, as tho' not absolutely and infallibly certain, yet *cannot*, with any good Reason, be *denied* or *excepted against*; According to that Saying of our *Saviour* to *St. Thomas*, in a like Case, with which I shall Conclude; *Joh. xx. 29. Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they,* (that is, they are more blessed, their Faith is more excellent and praise-worthy, and so will Intitle them to a greater Reward) *who have not seen, and yet have believed.*

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...as there is now ... in the ...  
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The

*The Sufficiency of the Scripture  
Revelation.*

*As to the Proof of it. PART II.*

The Fourth and Fifth  
**SERMONS,**

Preach'd April 1<sup>st</sup> and May 6<sup>th</sup>. 1700.

S<sup>t</sup> LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses  
and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if  
one went unto them from the dead, they  
will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses  
and the Prophets, neither will they be per-  
swaded, though one rose from the dead.*

**T**HE Point I entred upon the Proof of  
the last time was this,

(3.) That we have *sufficient Reason*  
given us to *convince us of the Truth and Autho-  
rity of the Holy Scripture*, and consequently of  
*all the Doctrines that are taught by it.*

And



Serm. And for the Proof of this, having, for

IV.

Brevity sake, confined my Discourse upon it to the *Books* of the *New Testament* only, (the rather because the Authority of that being granted, the Authority of the *Old Testament* cannot reasonably be questioned) I propounded to shew, 1. That we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof. 2. That there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to them in their *Relations* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded. And, 3. That if the *Matters of Fact* related in the *New Testament* are true, they are *sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and *Divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught.

And I hope enough was said the last time, to shew that we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof. What I am next to do, is,

2. To shew that there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to these *Authors* in their *Relations* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded.

And I hope none of you that hear me (whom I presume to be all *Christians*) will take Offence at it, if now, while I am arguing this Point, I sometimes speak of the *Holy Evangelists* with the same Freedom that might be used in speaking concerning any other *Authors*; and if I sometimes Plead for no more *Credit* to be given to them in their *Relations* than is fit and reasonable to be given to any other

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other *Historian* that was naturally as well furnished and qualified to write a true History as they were, and whose Fidelity and Veracity is as well attested and confirmed other Ways as theirs was. For you will consider, I hope, that my Business is now with *Infidels*, with whom we can argue only upon the Principles of common Reason: And tho' we who are *Christians* already, do believe, as one of the first Principles of our Religion, that these *Sacred Writers* were *divinely* and *supernaturally* assisted in their Work, and that upon that Account they deserve much greater Credit in what they have written than other *Historians* do; yet this is what those who are yet *Infidels* will not allow; And in Disputation nothing is to be presumed on one side but what will be readily allowed by the other Party. So that the *divine Inspiration* of the *Evangelical Writers* and the *supernatural Assistance* which we believe they had in their Writing cannot as yet be regularly insisted upon as an Argument to gain them Credit; But it is what will easily be granted afterwards, when the Truth of their History shall be well established upon other Grounds; (as I hope it will be in the following Discourse) and 'tis what may then serve to procure a *religious* Respect and Reverence to these *Sacred Writings*, and to ingage us to receive them, *not as the Word of Men, but (as they are in Truth) as the Word of God.* 1 Thess. ii. 13

But this one thing nevertheless I suppose I may presume, *viz.* that if the *Books* of the *New Testament* (the *Historical Parts* of it in particular) were written by those Authors to whom

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whom they are ascribed (which has been already proved) the *Matters of Fact* recorded by the *Evangelists in Writing* are the same which *they* and the other *Apostles* testified by Word of Mouth in their *Preaching*; For it cannot, I think, with any Reason, be suspected that their *Preaching* and *Writings* were disagreeable to each other, because such Disagreement would, most certainly, have utterly destroyed the Credit of them both.

And this being supposed, I hope, it will clearly appear that there is abundantly sufficient Reason to give full Credit to these Writings, if these following things be considered; (1.) If we consider the *Nature, Conditions* and *Circumstances* of the *Matters* that are recorded in the *Historical Books* of the *New Testament*, and of the *History* it self. (2.) If we consider the good *Capacity* that the *Authors* thereof were in to know the *Truth* of the things they have related. (3.) If we consider the strong *Obligations* they were under to write nothing but the *Truth*, according to the best of their Knowledge or Information. (4.) If we consider the good *Evidences* that we have of their *Honesty* and *Faithfulness*. And (5.) Lastly, If we consider the *Confirmation* that was given to the *Truth* of their *History* by *GOD himself*.

1. I say the *Evangelical History* will appear to be highly credible, if (without any Regard as yet had to the Ability and Integrity of its Authors) we only consider the *Nature, Conditions* and *Circumstances* of the *Matters* therein recorded, and of the *History* it self. Concerning which there are two things especially that



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that may be observed, 1. That the *Matters* recorded by the *Evangelical Writers* are such as might be certainly known. And 2. That they are such, and in such manner related by the *Evangelists*, that if their History of them had been false, it could never have gained Credit in the World.

1. First, I say the *Matters* recorded by the *Evangelical Writers* are such as might be certainly known; I mean, either by the *Historians* themselves, or by those from whom they had their Information. For,

1. They are, for the most part, plain *Matters of Sense*, which those who were present at them could have no doubt of without *Dis-trusting* their own *Faculties of Hearing or Seeing*; and which those who testified them might be as certain of the Truth of, as we can be of any thing that we hear with our own *Ears*, or see with our own *Eyes*. For, thus, whether our *Saviour* gave out himself to be the *Messias* foretold by the *Prophets*; whether he said that he was the *Son of God*; and whether he uttered those other *Speeches* which the *Evangelists* have recorded as spoken by him, could not but be certainly known by the *People* who often heard him; and especially by his *Apostles* who constantly attended him.

And so likewise whether he did those many wonderful *Works* which the *Evangelists* have recorded of him could not but be known by those that were present with him; They might be certain either that he did them, or that he did not do them. Thus for instance, it might be certainly known to those that first af-firmed

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firmed that he gave Sight to the Blind, whether those Persons had been once blind, and whether afterwards they saw; and to *those* that witnessed that he gave Strength to the Cripples, whether the Men whom they said he wrought this Cure upon, had been Lame or disabled in their Feet, Hands, or Body before, and whether afterwards they walked and had Strength like other Men; and to *those* that testified that he raised the Dead, whether the Persons said to have been raised by him, had been truly dead, and whether afterwards they lived.

*This Sermon  
was Preached  
on the Mon-  
day in Easter  
Week.*

But above all, his own *Resurrection* (which the *present Season* as well as the Wonderfulness and Importance of the thing obliges us to have a special Regard to) was a thing that might be most certainly known to *those* that pretended to be *Witnesses* of it; they might be certain whether he had been once dead, and whether he shewed himself alive after his *Passion* by many infallible Proofs, and was seen of them forty Days. Of this they might be rather more certain than of any other of his Miracles, because it was a thing not to be judged of by *one sense* only (as some of the rest were) but by almost all their Senses; for by their *Sight* they might be assured that it was *he himself*, whom for more than three Years before they had been well acquainted with, whom they then saw with their Eyes; and by their *Hearing*, that it was *his own Voice* and not a Stranger's, that Voice which they had often heard, and which they well knew, that then spake to them; and by their *Touch*, that it was a *real Body* which they saw and

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and heard, and not an airy Apparition; not a meer Voice: and also that it was *that* very same Body, which they had seen before hanging upon, and which they had taken down dead from the Cross, when they were permitted (as they say they were) to handle and feel him, to put their Fingers into the Print of the Nails, and to thrust their Hands into the Gash that had been made in his Side by the Spear that pierced his Heart. Lu. xxiv. 39. Joh. xx. 27.

And of the other Matters recorded by the Evangelists, but not as Matters of their own Knowledge, those from whom they had their Information might have the same Certainty which they had of these things. For his Mother could not but know whether she had conceived him without Knowledge of a Man; and whether his Birth had been foretold her by an Angel; And she, and her Relations, and the whole Neighbourhood might have a certain Knowledge of the Time, Place, and all other Circumstances of his Birth as they are related in the Gospels.

They that testified such plain Matters of Sense as most of those are, which are recorded in the Evangelical History, could not but know either that the things which they testified were true, or that they themselves were egregious Liars when they testified them to have been so.

2. As the Matters recorded in the Evangelical History are chiefly Matters of Sense; of which, as such, the greatest Certainty and Assurance may be had; and in which any single Witness thereof may be very confident that he is not mistaken; so it may be also ob-

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serv'd,



Serm. serv'd, that most of them are related as *Matters done* in the Sight, Hearing, or Presence of a *great many*; which *Circumstance* adds very much to that *Certainty* which any single Witness of such Matters may receive by his own Senses only.

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For tho' it be a common Saying, that *Seeing is Believing*, and we ordinarily desire no greater Assurance of the Truth of any Matter of Sense, than our own Sense and Perception of it; it is nevertheless no unusual thing for a Man when he is relating somewhat that happen'd that was very extraordinary and surprizing, to say, that tho' he saw it himself, he could hardly believe his own Eyes. And this might well enough have been the Case of any one of the Witnesses of any our Lord's Miracles, (and especially of his *Resurrection*, the most wonderful of all his Miracles, and which gave Confirmation to all the rest;) for tho' they were plain Matters of Sense, yet they were withal so very *strange* and *astonishing*, that if any Man had seen them *alone*, he might probably have had some *Distrust* even of his *own Senses*, or he might afterwards have been ready to *doubt* whether he had been well *awake* or in a *Dream*. But a Man cannot so reasonably suspect that his own Senses do deceive him, when he perceives that the thing appears to *all* others that are present, just as it does to him; nor can he afterwards so easily fancy that he was in a *Dream*, when he finds that *all* the rest that were there have the same Notion and Remembrance of the thing that he himself has. So that by this *Additional*

*Evidence*

*Evidence*, I mean by the *Agreement* that a Man finds there is between his own Senses and other Mens, he becomes *more certain* and *confident* of the Truth of the things which he sees, than he would have been by his *own Eye-sight* only.

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2. Secondly ; The other thing which I said might be noted concerning the *Matters Recorded* in the *Evangelical History*, is, That they are *such*, and in *such manner* related by the *Evangelists* ; that if their History of them had been *false*, it could *never* have gained *Credit* in the World.

And this may in Part appear from what has been said already ; For as there is nothing that can be more certainly known and attested than a plain *Matter of Sense* at which *several* are *present* ; so there is nothing more *liable* to be *contradicted* and *easie* to be *disproved* than *such a Matter* is, in case it was not so done as 'tis reported to have been.

But there are several other things that are here proper to be considered ; for,

1. It may be considered that the *Gospel History* comprehends a very *great number* of Relations of such Matters of Fact and Sense ; Considering therefore how very easie it was to disprove *every one* of them if it had been *false* ; 'tis, most evidently, morally impossible that a History *stuffed* with nothing else but *Lyes* and *Forgeries* of this sort, (as they must suppose the *Evangelical History* to be, who will not allow it to be a true History) should ever have obtained any Credit. And most of the things recorded by the *Evangelists*, being related by them as *Matters* of their own

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Knowledge ;

Serm. *Knowledge* ; if the *Falsity* of only one single  
 IV. Relation had been made appear, the *Credit* of  
 the *whole* History would have been thereby  
 destroyed.

2. It may be also considered that all these things are related in the *Gospel History* as done in that *same Country* in which the History thereof was first published ; and *that* a Country but of *small Extent*, not above two hundred Miles in length at the most, and not half so much in breadth ; and yet not all in the same part of it, but some in *one* place, some in *another* ; and those usually the most *considerable* Towns or Cities of *Judea* and *Galilee*. And *by this*, their History of these things, if it had been false, was still more easie and liable to be disproved ; there being very few of those to whom these Matters were first related, that needed to have gone many Miles from Home to have enquired into the Truth of some or other of them. And if any Man had found the *Apostles* false in their Report of any Matter that was said to have been done in his own Neighbourhood, he would hardly have gone farther for more satisfaction ; he would readily have concluded without further Examination, that being found *False Witnesses* in *one* thing, they were not fit to be believed in any thing.

3. It may be moreover considered, that the *Gospel History* was written and published in a *few years* after the things therein Recorded are said to be done. It is not certain indeed in what Year precisely the *Gospels* were written ; But if they are but allowed to be the genuine



genuine Writings of the reputed Authors; (which I hope has been already sufficiently prov'd) 'tis certain they were all, (even the latest of them, that of *St. John*) written before the Memory of the Things therein recorded could be worn out; nay if we further suppose (as I think we may do very reasonably) that the Things recorded by the *Evangelists* are the *same* which they and the other *Apostles* and *Disciples* of our *Lord* testified by word of Mouth in their Preaching, we may truly enough say that the *History* of the *Gospel* was begun to be published on that *same Day* on which the *Apostles* began to Preach, viz. on the *Day of Pentecost*, ten Days after our *Lord's* Ascension; and that it was fully published in a very short time after. So that most of the things recorded in the *Gospels* are things that had been done or had happened in the compass of less than *four Years* before the *History* thereof was first published, for it was not so long from our *Lord's* Baptism to his *Ascension*; and the earliest things of all that are therein recorded (which are but few, and make but a small Part of the *History*) viz. the Birth of *St. John Baptist*, and of our *Lord*, and the things that happened about that Time, were things done not above thirty five Years before at the most.

And the *History* of the *Acts of the Apostles* (which because it ends with *St. Paul's* Imprisonment at *Rome*, we may reasonably think was published about that Time) comprehends a *History* of some very remarkable things, the very *first* and earliest whereof had not been done thirty Years before.

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Serm. And this Consideration affords another very  
 IV. probable Argument of the *Truth* of the *Evangelical History*; because by this it still further appears how very easie it would have been to have disproved it if it had been false; for it being an History of things done so very *lately*, it must needs be that several of those into whose Hands it first came, must have *certain Knowledge* whether some of the things therein related had been so or not; And they who had not this *Knowledge*, might easily have had *certain Information*, (from others, I mean, besides the *Apostles* and *Disciples* of our *Lord*) whether the Relations therein contained were true or false.—Especially if it be considered further, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Place.

4. That the *Facts* related in the *Evangelical History* are commonly related with all the *Circumstances* that were needful or proper to be noted in order to the rendring an Enquiry into the Truth of them, exceeding easie to such as had any distrust thereof. For in the Account which the *Evangelists* give us of our *Saviour's Speeches*, they commonly tell us not only his Words, but likewise *when, where, to whom*, and *upon what Occasion* they were spoken; and in the Account that they give of his *Miracles*, they usually note the *Places* where they were done, and very often the *Names*, or *Characters* at least, of the *Persons* they were wrought upon, and sometimes they mention also *who* were by and *Witnesses* thereof, and what *Discourse* concerning him was thereby occasioned; And in relating the things that were done or happened before our *Saviour's Baptism*, about the *Time* of his Birth.

Birth, they carefully note the *Time*, the *Place*, and other *Circumstances*, whereby their *Readers* were (as it were) *challeng'd* to make Enquiry, and *desired* not to take things only upon their *Credit*; and were also *directed* readily *whither* to go, and *to whom* to apply themselves to obtain the fullest satisfaction whether the things they reported were so or not. And if all the *Circumstances* of every particular Story which they relate are not always so punctually set down, the Omission thereof sometimes is not of much Consideration, because it was so very easie by enquiring into the Truth of those many *other Stories* which are related with all *Circumstances* for any Person to be satisfied whether their History in general deserv'd Credit or not; And whoever had found any *one* Story falsly reported by them, would hardly have troubled himself, (at least not for his own satisfaction) to have examined further into the Truth of the rest.

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The same may  
be observed in  
the Acts of  
the Apostles.

5. It may be further consider'd that most of the things recorded by the *Evangelists* are related by them as things that were *done* very *publickly*, as things that were *well known* to a *great many*. For very few in Comparison of those *Discourses* of our Lord that are recorded by the *Evangelists*, were address'd in private to his *Apostles* only, but most of them were spoken in publick; his set Sermons commonly to great *multitudes* gathered together on a *Mountain*, on the *Sea-shore*, or in a *Synagogue*; and the rest, most commonly in *Places* of *Resort*, in populous *Towns* or *Cities*, in *Jerusalem* or the *Temple*, when many were by to hear



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Acts i. 21.

what he said. And his *Miracles* were *done* for the most part in the best Inhabited *Cities* of *Judea* and *Galilee*; or if in other Places, yet in the open *Day-light*, and commonly when there was a great *croud* of *People* about him; Or if at any time the Miracle it self was done privately, in an *House*, or a *Chamber*, the *Effect* of the Miracle was usually very *visible*, and such as could not but be taken notice of by a great many. And even of those few things which were spoken or done by him most privately, there was *no want* of *Witnesses*; there being (except very rarely) no fewer than *twelve* in constant Attendance upon him, and *several* others besides that *Companied with them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them.*

And *this Circumstance* of the *Facts* recorded by the *Evangelists*, as it made them capable of better and more certain Attestation, being true; so it contributed no less towards the rendring it *easy* to *disprove* that Relation which they had given of them, if it had been false. For when a Man witnesses a thing of his own private Knowledge there may be no way to invalidate his Testimony, but either by shewing that the thing which he testifies was not possible, or by offering some just Exception to the credit of the Witness; But when neither of these can be done (and they cannot always be done altho' the thing testified be false) yet in case the Matter was done *publickly*, it is the easiest thing in the World to convict a false Witness by the *contrary Testimony* of *several others* that were present and as capable of knowing the Truth of the thing as himself; or by the *Clashing* of the  
Witnesses

*Witnesses* among themselves. Nothing therefore could have been more easie than to have disproved the *Evangelical History* in almost every particular of it, if it had not been true.

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For most of our *Saviour's* Speeches and Miracles are related as spoken and done in the Presence not of his *Disciples* only, but of a great *many others* that happened to be by *Chance*, or that followed him, not for any Liking that they had to his Person or Doctrine, but only out of *Curiosity*, or *for the Sake of the Loaves*; and very often they were done before *such* as came on purpose to watch what he said and did, with a Design to lay hold on any Occasion that was offer'd to represent him to the People as an *Impostor*. Can it be suppos'd then that *these* were ignorant whether the Relation which the *Apostles* and *Evangelists* gave of these Matters was true or false? Or can it be imagin'd that they would all have held their Peace? that not *one*, of those many that could have done it, would have opened his Mouth to have convicted the *Apostles* of Falsity, if they had either in Word or Writing related any one of these things otherwise than it had indeed been transacted? And if in any one of these things, of which the *Apostles* pretended they had personal Knowledge, they had been found *false Witnesses*, their *Credit* would have been ruin'd for ever.

Nay if they had been found false in their Report of any of those *other Matters* which they have left upon Record, of which they had not a personal Knowledge; tho' this indeed wou'd not have been such a Proof of their Dishonesty (for any Man may very innocently

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nocently be mis-inform'd) it wou'd however have been such a plain Argument of their *foolish Credulity*, as would have *destroy'd* their *Credit* no less than if they had been found in a known Lye. For these also were Matters of the same *publick Nature*; nay indeed they were rather *more publick* than the other; they were so very publick that any Man with very small Trouble might have been fully satisfied whether they were true or not.

For thus, they tell us that our *Lord* was of the *Seed of David*; (and it was a Matter of the greatest Consequence to the *Christian Religion* that he should be known to be so;) How very easie was it at that time, when the *Genealogies* of all the *Jewish Families*, and of the *Family of David* more especially, were kept with the greatest Carefulness and Exactness, for *them* to know this; And how very easie was it, for any one that doubted it, to have inspected the publick *Registers*, and seen whether it was so or not?

Luke ii. 1,  
6c.

They tell us also several *Circumstances* of our *Lord's Birth*, and several *Accidents* that happened about that time; They tell us, for instance, that *Joseph* being of the *House and Lineage of David*, was forced with *Mary* his Wife, at a very inconvenient time for her, being *great with Child*, to take a long Journey of about an hundred Miles, from *Nazareth* in *Galilee*, where their Habitation then was, to *Bethlem* in *Judea*, the *City of David*, that so their Names might be enrolled with the rest of the *Family of David*, when *Augustus Caesar* had ordered a general Enrolment of the whole *Jewish Nation*; they

Math. ii. 1,  
6c.

tell us that then and there *Jesus* was born; that



that at the time of his Birth certain *Wise Men out of the East*, conducted by a *Star*, came to *Judea* in Quest of the *Messias*; that they informed *Herod* of the Design of their coming; that they were directed by the *Council* of the *Chief Priests* and *Scribes* to look for him in *Bethlehem*; that *Herod* disappointed of the Design he had to kill this new-born *King* of the *Jews*, by their not returning back to him according to his Appointment, sent forth, and, that he might make sure work of it, slew all the Children in *Bethlehem* that were under two years old; and several other things they tell us of the like kind, easie to be known if true, and no less easie to be disproved if false. For whether there had been such a \**Taxing* or *Enrolment* of the whole Nation of the *Jews* according to their Families, by the Order of the *Emperor*, could not but be well known to all the *Jews*; And the People of *Nazareth* could not but know, when *Joseph* went from thence, and whither he went, and upon what Occasion, and how long it was before he returned; and the People at *Jerusalem* could not but long remember the Story of the *Wise Men*, at whose coming *Herod* and the whole City with him was so much troubled; and if there had been no such thing, would readily have contradicted the *Apostle's* Relation of it; And the *Mothers* at *Bethlehem* which survived the Loss of their dear Children, could never after while they lived forget that general Mourning that there had once been amongst them, nor the Occasion of it. If therefore these and such like things related by the *Evangelists* as things publicly done, and much talked of, and of which (as they say) the Rumour was spread far and near, had

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\**Απογες*  
φñ.

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 IV. *History* would have been thereby so much *dis-*  
 paraged, that no part of it would ever have had  
 much Credit.

'Tis true indeed there are some things re-  
 lated by the *Evangelists* that were not altoge-  
 ther so *publick* as those I have before mention-  
 ed; for there are some things, of which (ac-  
 cording to the Account that is given of them  
 in the *Evangelical History*) none but the *Dis-*  
*ciples* of *Christ* were *Witnesses*; such in parti-  
 cular was the *Resurrection* of our *Lord*, which  
 we at this time commemorate; and which is  
 for that Reason most proper to be now in-  
 stanced in. Of *this* then I say (as well as of  
 some few other things) it must be granted, that  
 it was a *Fact* that could directly be witnessed  
 only by *his own Friends*, by *his Apostles* and *Dis-*  
*ciples*; for so St. *Peter* observes, speaking of  
 this Matter, *Acts* x. 40, 41. *Him GOD raised*  
*up the third Day, and shewed him openly, not to*  
*all the People, but to Witnesses chosen before of*  
*GOD, even to us who did eat and drink with*  
*him after he rose from the Dead.* But neverthe-  
 less, considering how long, and how often he is  
 reported to have appeared to them, and the  
 many *Circumstances* that are noted concerning  
 his *several Apparitions*, and the great *Number*  
 of those whom he is said to have appeared to,  
 (for St. *Paul* affirms that besides his frequent  
 Apparitions to his *Apostles*, he was seen at once  
 by above five hundred Brethren) their *Testimony*  
 in this Matter, if it had been false, was very  
 near as easie and liable to be disproved, as in  
 any of the Matters before spoken of. For it  
 is very hard for so much as two *Men* that are  
 hired,

† Cor. xv. 6.

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hired, or agree together to give in a false Evidence, to be so well instructed in the Evidence they are to give, or to concert the Matter so well between themselves, but that upon a *separate Examination* their Falsity may easily be detected by their *Disagreement* in some considerable Circumstances of the Matter they bear Witness to; How very much easier then would it have been to have done this, in a Matter clothed with such great *variety* of Circumstances, and which was testified by *so many*, by *Twelve*, by *Seventy*, by *above five hundred Persons*.

Or if it can be supposed, that they might have all so fully *agreed* before-hand, in what Manner and with Circumstances to tell this Story, that it might not be possible to *catch* them in a *Contradiction*; yet the thing it self was of that Nature, that the false Evidence they had given concerning it (if it had been false) might easily have been shewn *other ways*; for what they testified was that *that same Jesus* whom the *Jews* had Crucified, and whom they had seen laid into the Sepulchre was risen again, and had been seen alive three Days after his Passion by several of his Disciples; Had this therefore been false, how very *easy* would it have been for the *Jews* to have *disproved* their Evidence of it, by only going to the Sepulchre, and taking out thence his *dead Body* and *exposing* it for some time to *publick view*? And thither doubtless they did go, and with this Design; but the Body they could not find, and yet they had taken all the Caution that was possible to prevent its being conveyed away, having obtain'd from *Pilate* a Guard of  
Soldiers



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Matt. xxviii.  
13.

Soldiers on purpose to keep watch over it for three Days. This therefore is a strong Confirmation of the Truth of the *Apostle's* Testimony concerning our *Lord's Resurrection*, that it being such a thing as might with the greatest Ease in the World have been disproved if it had been false; the *Jews* had nothing to say against it, nothing to oppose to it, but only that very ill contrived, that self-contradicting Evidence of the Watchmen; who said that while they were asleep, that is, when all their senses were bound up, and when they were not in a Capacity of knowing any thing that was done, the *Disciples came and stole the Body away*. But if they saw the Body remov'd (in which Case only they could be good Witnesses of it) they were not, as they said they were, asleep when the thing was done; Or if indeed they were asleep, when it was removed, they could not be positive how it was removed, they could not say he was not risen from the Dead.

6. Another thing that may be consider'd in order to shew how very improbable, or rather how impossible it was that the *Gospel History* should ever have gained Credit in the World if it had been false, is this; that as it was a History of such Matters and was so contrived that it might with the greatest Ease have been disproved, so the Matters therein related were in themselves, and especially in their Consequences, such as must needs have engaged a great many to make the strictest Examination that was possible into the Truth of them; and if they had discovered any thing of Falshood therein, to make known their Discovery to the World.

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For the whole *Doctrine* of *Christianity* was grounded upon the Truth of the *Evangelical History*; *This* disprov'd would have destroy'd *that*, and *this* being admitted, there was no way to put a stop to the spreading of *that*; And the certain *Consequence* of receiving the *Christian Religion* in the World, was the Abolishing of all the other Forms of Religion that were then any where receiv'd or establish'd; even of *that* which had been introduc'd by *Moses* amongst the *Jews*, by the Appointment of *GOD* himself, as well as of the several sorts of *Paganism* and *Idolatry* that were receiv'd in other Countries. Now when any *Religion*, be it true or false, is the *establish'd Religion* of a Country, there must needs be a great many ingaged by the strongest Worldly Interest to support and maintain it. For it was not only at *Ephesus* that a great number of *Crafts-men* got their *Wealth* by making *Silver Shrines* for *Diana*, but in every other Country the *Living* of a considerable Number depended upon the *Religion* that was therein receiv'd; which being destroy'd, and their *Trade* or Profession thereby at an End, they must of necessity be hard put to it to get Bread by taking up some new Employment. And besides, there is nothing that *all Men*, of what Trade or Profession soever they are, are generally so zealous and concern'd about, nothing that they are so afraid of any Change or Innovation in, as *Religion*; *This*, be it well or weakly grounded, yet if it be that Form of Religion that they have receiv'd from their Fathers, and been bred up in from their Childhood, they will not easily let go.

Acts xix. 24.  
&c.

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So that I said too little, when I said before that a *great many* must needs have been engaged to set themselves to discover the Falsity of the *Evangelical History*; for this was in truth the common Concern of *all Mankind*, except only of those few Persons who had been instructed by our *Saviour*, and believed him to be the *Christ*; All others, whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*, Rich or Poor, Learned or Ignorant, Priests or People, were engaged either by *Interest*, or *Prejudice*, or *Conscience*, or upon some other Account to convict the *Apostles* of Falshood in their Relation of the Matters contain'd in the *Evangelical History*; and if any Falshood had been therein, it is impossible, (considering how obvious it must needs lie to Discovery, and how many were at Work to find it out) that they could have failed of their Aim; And if any one had made the Discovery, it can't be imagin'd he would have been long before he had imparted to others a Piece of News so very welcome as that would have been to the Generality of Mankind, or that such a Discovery of the Falsity of the *Gospel History* in any one particular, once made and publish'd should ever after have been stifled or suppress'd; because the same Reasons that put them at first upon making the Discovery, were of the same Force afterwards to engage them to preserve the Memory of any Discovery of that kind that had been made.

And therefore I add, in the last Place; And 'tis that which gives Weight and Strength, to all that has been said before upon this Subject, and fully compleats that Argument which

I am



I am now upon for the Proof of the Truth Serm.  
of the *Gospel History*. IV.

7. That notwithstanding the Easiness of the Disproof of this History if it had been false, and the incessant Endeavours of the Adversaries of Christianity to find out some Falshood therein, (to do which they were not only prompted by their own Interest and Inclination, but also frequently and boldly challenged by the *Christians* themselves, as may be seen in the ancient *Apologies* for the *Christian Faith*) it is nevertheless a History of very good Credit now (cavilled at perhaps, but not denied, not pretended to be disproved either by *Jews* or *Mahometans*, or any other sort of *Infidels*) and that it has been of the like good Credit for many Hundred Years past, even ever since the first Publication of it; and that 'tis not so much as contradicted in any Point, by any other *Historian* that living in or near the Time of its Writing, was in a Capacity to contradict it upon good Grounds; viz. upon either certain Knowledge of his own, or very credible Information from others that any Matter therein had been falsely related.

True, perhaps the *Infidels* will say, There is indeed no History of competent Antiquity now extant, by which the *Gospel History* can be disproved; but that there has been no such History cannot with certainty be affirmed. This therefore (say they) is our Unhappiness, that tho' we have a good Cause we are destitute of Means to support it; and are in the Condition that the *Israelites* are said to have been in, in the Days of *Saul*, when they

I had

Serm. had War with the *Philistines* ; It came to pass  
IV. in the Day of Battel there was neither Sword

nor Spear found in the hand of any of the Peo-  
ple. But what was the Reason of this? Why,

*2 Sam. xiii. 22.*

Yer. 19.

the *Philistines* had disarmed them ; they had taken away the Weapons they had before, and would not permit more to be made. And this, say the *Infidels*, is exactly our Case ; In the War we have now with the *Christians* we are forc'd to fight without Sword or Spear ; And tho' for other good Reasons we are confident the *Gospel History* is false, and are resolved never to believe it, and make no doubt but that in former times it has been opposed and contradicted ; yet in this the *Christians* have been too hard and too cunning for us ; that while they have kept their own Weapons they have sily taken away ours ; for they have been careful to preserve the ancient Books that were written by those of their own Party in Defence of their *Superstition*, but the Books of their *Adversaries* they have been as careful to suppress and destroy ; And they have had such good Success in it, that of all the Books or Discourses of the ancient Champions of *Judaism*, *Paganism* or *Deism* (*Trypho*, *Celsus*, *Porphyry*, *Julian*, and other great Names) not much is now remaining besides Fragments (and those perhaps imperfectly or falsely cited) to be picked up out of the Books of those who have written Answers to them, who, we may well presume, took notice only of those Passages therein which they thought were easiest to be answer'd. But this is no unusual thing, for the powerful and prevailing Party to stifle that Evidence which they know

know not how to disprove, and to suppress *Serm.*  
 those Books which they cannot answer. And *IV.*  
 this, say they, we take for a good Argument  
 that there was something very considerable  
 in these Books, and not easily to be answer'd,  
 because otherwise the *Christians* of former  
 times would have been more willing that  
 they should be preserv'd and transmitted to  
 after-times, that so Posterity upon a fair  
 Hearing of all that had been said on both  
 sides, might be able to pass a right Judg-  
 ment upon the Case, and either to chuse or  
 to reject the Profession of *Christianity*, with  
 Prudence and Discretion.

This is what has been sometimes suggested  
 by the Enemies of our Religion; and indeed  
 I know not what else can well be said to in-  
 validate that Proof of the *Gospel History* which  
 I am now upon. But what slender ground  
 there is for this Suggestion, and how very  
 little the Christian Cause is affected by it, a  
 few Words will suffice to shew.

For, 1. Whereas 'tis said, that tho' indeed  
 there are no Histories now in being where-  
 by the *Gospel History* can be disproved, 'tis  
 possible however there may have formerly  
 been several *Narratives* extant that were per-  
 fectly contradictory to it, and those too per-  
 haps better attested and confirmed than the  
*Gospel History* was; To this I answer; That  
 'tis never allow'd to be a good Proof that a  
 thing is, to say that 'tis possible it might be.  
 And besides, if this Surmise or Suggestion of  
 a thing barely possible be a good Objection  
 against the *Gospel History*, it is as much an  
 Objection against all other ancient Histories;



Serm. If for this Reason the *Gospel History* be not  
 IV. credible, no other History is so ; for there  
 is no ancient History in the World now extant, which we can be sure was never contradicted by some other, as ancient History, that is not extant.

But, 2. As there is no Evidence that the *Gospel History* was contradicted when it was first publish'd, that is, when, if it had been false, it might most easily have been disprov'd ; so there is on the other Side, as good Evidence as such a Matter is capable of, that it never was thus contradicted or disproved ; Because if the Facts recorded by the *Evangelical History* had been then denied or disproved by any competent and credible Witnesses, 'tis impossible that the *Christian Doctrine*, which was grounded upon and chiefly established by these Facts, should ever have spread so fast as by the Confession of all Parties it did, from the time that it began to be Preached by the *Apostles*. Nothing but the strong Evidence that there was of the Truth of the *Gospel History* (and strong it cannot be accounted, if there was stronger and better Evidence on the other side) could have supported the Profession of *Christianity*, (when it had nothing to recommend it self by but its Purity and Truth) against that violent Opposition which it met with every where in the World. And,

3. Whereas 'tis further suggested, that the Loss of those ancient Books which are supposed to have been written to disprove the *Gospel History*, is owing to the Power and Subtilty of the *Christians* of those early times,  
 who

who thought it best to *stifle* that *Evidence* which they could not gainsay or refute; this Suggestion is manifestly as groundless as 'tis malicious.

Serm.  
IV.

For many Books of all sorts and of all sides, have perish'd by *Accident*, or been worn out by *Time*, without any formal Design of any Party or Persons to suppress and destroy them; And I see no Reason why these *Books* written in *contradiction* to the *Gospel History* (if indeed any such were ever written) may not have perished one of these ways, as well as many other Books have done.

Or if a *Reason* must needs be given why some Books (and why *these* in particular) have been lost, while others of the same or greater Antiquity have been preserv'd; I think the little *Value* that Men generally had for those Books that are lost, is the best Reason that can be given why they were suffered to perish; and that the most probable Cause of Mens having so little value for them, was because the *Matter* of them was so evidently *false*, or the *Reasoning* of them so manifestly *weak* and *fallacious*, that no Man thought it worth his while to be at the Pains or Charge of getting them transcribed.

Or if the Men we are now arguing with will not allow this to be a good Account of the Loss of such very *valuable Books* as they think these *Anti-Gospel Histories* were, let them find out a better. But I'm sure that *that* before suggested by them, *viz.* that it was by *Design*; the first *Christians* purposely *abolishing* and *destroying* all *Testimonies* and *Records* that made against them, is a much worse

Serm. Account of it, and infinitely more improbable than that which I have given.

IV.

For it must be supposed either that these *Anti-Gospels Histories* were written very early, as soon almost as the *Gospel History* was published by the Preaching or Writing of the *Apostles*, or else in *after-Times*; And if they were *destroyed* by the *Christians*, this must have been done, either *soon after* they were written, or else after they had been for *some time* receiv'd and allow'd as true Histories by the Adversaries of the *Christian Faith*.

Now if it be suppos'd that *these Books* were not written till a *good while after* the *Apostles* had Preach'd, and the *Evangelists* written the *Gospel*; they were written *too late* to be of sufficient Authority to weaken the Credit of the *Gospel-History*: For how could those that were not *born* when the things recorded in the *Gospel* were said to be done, pretend to contradict the Testimony of those who were *living* at that time, and who testified either that they saw them with their *own Eyes*, or that they receiv'd that Account of them which they publish'd from very *credible Persons*, who said they had been *Eye witnesses* thereof?

But if it be supposed that *these Books* were written *sooner*, even as soon almost as the *Evangelists* wrote, or the *Apostles* began to publish, by their Preaching, the *Gospel-History*; then I say 'tis impossible they should be *suppress'd* and *destroy'd* by the *Christians*, either *then*, or *afterwards*.

Not *then*; for tho' we grant that Christianity from the very first Preaching of it, made a very swift Progress in the World; and from



from a Beginning no bigger than a Grain of Mustard-seed, grew up quickly to be a goodly Tree, shadowing many Nations under the Branches of it; yet it did not spring up like a *Mushroom* in a *Night*; it did not grow to this *Bigness* all at once. And what were the *Christians* in the weak and infant state of the Church, but an Handful of Men in Comparison with their numberless Opposers, and those too without *Wealth*, without *Power*, of no *Interest* or *Esteem* in the World; that they should undertake to corrupt or stifle the *Evidence* that was given against them, which was supported by the *Secular Power*, and gladly receiv'd and embrac'd by all other Men but themselves? What were they, that they should be able to call in all the *Books* that had been written against them, and to suppress and destroy them at their Pleasure? and that too so fully and effectually, as that with the *Books* themselves which they destroy'd, all *Memory* of them should likewise perish? A powerful and prevailing Party, with the Government on its side, may indeed do much in this kind, and yet hardly so much as this; But they that believe the *Christians* to have been such a powerful and prevailing Party, early enough to hinder the spreading and dispersing of any *Books* that were written against them, believe, without any Ground or Warrant from History, a more unaccountable and incredible thing than any that is recorded in the *Gospel*.

But if this could not be done then, it might perhaps be done afterwards; For in progress of Time 'tis certain (it may be said)

Serm. that the *Christians* did come to be of very  
 IV. great *Power* and *Interest*, and able to *bear*  
 down all their *Opposers*; and 'tis likely enough  
 that *then* they might set themselves to *destroy*  
 all those *Monuments* of *Antiquity* whereby  
 their *fabulous Gospels* had been contradicted  
 and disprov'd; And 'tis not incredible that  
 they should so far succeed in their Attempt  
 as to leave no means to *Posterity* to discern  
 how weak and sandy a *Foundation* their *Religion*  
 was built upon.

But this Supposition (taking it altogether)  
 involves a greater *Difficulty*, and supposes a  
 greater *Miracle* than the former did. For  
 whatever the *Christians* might attempt to  
 do, or whatever they might be able to do,  
 after they had attained to such great *Power*,  
 and were become the most numerous and  
 prevailing Party; 'tis utterly *incredible* that  
 they ever could have attained to such great  
*Power*, that they ever could have become  
 the most numerous and prevailing Party, if in-  
 deed the *Gospel History* had, almost from the  
 very Beginning, been opposed and contradi-  
 cted by other *Histories* that were more cre-  
 dible than the *Gospel History* was.

For it must be, and is, granted by all, that  
 at the first *Preaching* of *Christianity* all world-  
 ly *Power* and *Interest* were on the other side,  
 and engaged most strongly to hinder the  
*Growth* and spreading of it. Now when  
*Truth* is on one side, and *Power* and *Interest*  
 on the other, 'tis not impossible that *Truth*  
 may at last prevail against *Interest*, and bring  
 the *Power* also to be on its side; But if *Truth*  
 (I mean that which hath most Appearance of  
 Truth,

Truth, I say if Truth) and *Power* and *Interest* are all on the same side from the Beginning, (as, it must be allowed, they were, by those who say, that the *Gospel History* was quickly prov'd false by other Histories written and publish'd about the same time) than I say it is utterly impossible that an *Imposture* quickly discover'd to be an *Imposture*, and which serv'd no worldly Interest, should ever have so gained ground as *Christianity* did, against that apparent *Truth* and mighty *Power* and *Interest* that were on the other side. So that whatever Progress *Christianity* might have made for a short time at first, by reason of the Boldness and Confidence of its first Preachers, it must needs be that immediately from and after the Time that the *Anti-Gospel Histories* (of better Credit and Authority than the *Gospel-History* was) were publish'd, it must have declined much faster than it had before increased; and in a very few Years have so dwindled to nothing, that 'tis like in the Age in which we live there would hardly have been so much as any Remembrance of it left.

And now, if nothing more could be said upon this Subject (for I have not time at present to take into Consideration the *other Proofs* before hinted at of the *Truth* of the *Gospel-History*) I think what has been said already is enough to shew that there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to the *Evangelical Writers*, in their *Relations* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded; This I'm sure of, that upon much less Evidence and Assurance of Truth

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IV.



Serm. Truth than we have in this, we generally give  
 IV. Credit to other Histories.

For we believe other *Historians* in their Relation of such Matters as they could not have so *certain Knowledge* or so *good Assurance* of, as the *Evangelical Writers* might have of those plain *Matters of Fact* and *Sense* which they have related in *their History*.

And again, we believe other *Historians* giving an Account of things which they do not pretend to have had a *personal Knowledge* of; which were done in *Countries* far *distant* from them; and in *Times* long before them; which their *Readers* had no *Means* to enquire into the Truth of; which were done in *secret*, or when but *few* were by; and which if they were falsely related, none were *engaged* by any *Worldly Interest* to be at much *Pains* to *disprove*.

And Lastly, If *Two Historians* of the same Antiquity give different or contradictory Accounts of the same Matter, we do not for that Reason alone presently *reject* either of them; but we enquire which of them was in the *best Capacity* to know the Truth, and which of them is the least *liable* to the *suspicion* of *falsehood*, and which Story is the most *probably related*, and to the Belief of *that* we incline.

If therefore there be any Man that thinks there is any truth in History, and who does give Credit to other Histories, (and I believe there is no Man but does so) and yet will not be persuaded to allow that the *Gospel History* is very *credible*, (which contains a Relation  
 only

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only of such *Matters of Sense* as it was morally impossible there should be any *Cheat* or *Deceit* in; and in which if there had been any *Deceit* or *Mistake* it was morally impossible that it should not be *discovered* and *disprov'd*; and which, yet, neither is now nor ever was *contradicted* by any *History* of competent *Antiquity* and good *Credit*; ) I think we may very well conclude, that 'tis not *Reason* or *Judgment*; but *Prejudice*, or *Interest*, or the *Love* of some *Vice* or *Lust* that makes him an *Infidel*.

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impossible there should be any other  
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## T H E

## Fifth SERMON.

S<sup>t</sup> LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

**T**HE Subject I was upon in my last Discourse on these Words, and which I left unfinish'd, was to shew, That there is *sufficient Reason* to give full Credit to the *Authors* of the *Historical Books* of the *New Testament* in their *Relations* of those *Matters* of *Fact* which they have recorded.

For the Proof of which I propos'd these following things to be considered; (1.) The *Nature, Conditions* and *Circumstances* of the *Matters* they have recorded, and of the *History* it self. (2.) The good *Capacity* they were in to *know* the *Truth* of the *Things* they have related. (3.) The strong *Obligations* they were under to *write* nothing but the *Truth* according

Serm.

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ing to the best of their Knowledge or Information. (4.) The good *Evidences* that we have of their *Honesty* and *Faithfulness*. And (5.) Lastly, The *Confirmation* that was given to the *Truth* of their History by *GOD himself*.

The last Discourse was spent in the Consideration of the first of these things. I proceed now to the Second, *viz.*

(2.) The good *Capacity* that the *Writers* of the *Evangelical History* were in to *know* the *Truth* of those things which they have related.

Now the *Matters of History* which are related in the *Epistles* are but few, and those for the most part, such as had been done by or had happened to, either the *Persons* that wrote them, or the *Churches* or *Persons* to whom they were written; so that of these we shall not need to say any thing.

For the *Bulk* or *Body* of the *Evangelical History* is contain'd in the *Four Gospels*, and in the *Acts of the Apostles*; And of the *Authors* of these Books there is no *Controversie* in the *Christian Church*; And if they were written by the *reputed Authors*, a few Words will suffice to shew that they were in a very good *Capacity* to *know* the *Truth* of the Things they have recorded, much better than most other ancient *Historians*, whose *Relations*, nevertheless, are generally thought worthy of *Credit*.

For *St. Matthew* and *St. John*, two of the four *Evangelists* were of the number of those *Twelve* who were in constant Attendance upon our *Lord*, from the Time that he first began to preach and to make *Disciples*, until he

was

was taken up into Heaven; so that they were themselves *Eye or Ear-Witnesses* of most of the Things which they have recorded.

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Of St. *Mark* and St. *Luke* indeed the same cannot be said; neither is it certain that they were of the Number of the Seventy Disciples, (tho' that be affirmed by some of the Ancients:) But this I think is agreed to by all; that St. *Mark* was for some part of his Life a constant Companion of St. *Peter*, who was not only one of the *Twelve*, but, most probably, the *First* that was call'd to be an *Apostle*, and who was also one of the *three* with whom our Lord was most intimate and familiar (for we often read, that *Peter*, and *James* and *John* were singled from the rest to be Witnesses of some of the most private Transactions of his Life:) And it was generally believed in the Ancient Church, that St. *Peter* was more truly the Author of the Gospel called St. *Mark's* than St. *Mark* himself; He being only the *Scribe* or *Amanuensis*, and St. *Peter* the Person that dictated the things written by him; whence also this Gospel is by some of the Ancients stiled the Gospel of St. *Peter*. And of this there seem to be some Tokens even in the History it self; particularly in that Relation that is therein given of St. *Peter's* Denial of his Master, and of his Repentance for it; for his Denial is there told with some more Circumstances than in the other Gospels, (such as the Person himself chiefly concerned was best able to know and might best remember;) And the Account that is given of his Repentance, is by this Author expressed more modestly (as it best became a Person to speak who spake of himself) than it

Mat. xvii. 4.  
— xxvi. 37.  
Mark v. 37.



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it is by the other *Evangelists*; for St. *Matthew* and St. *Luke* say that he wept bitterly; but St. *Mark* (or rather St. *Peter* himself dictating those Words) only says, that *when he thought thereon he wept*.

It is likewise agreed on all Hands that St. *Luke*, if not one of the Seventy Disciples (which, 'tis most probable he was not) was, however a very early Convert to Christianity; that he conversed frequently with the *Apostles* and immediate *Disciples* of our Lord, and was a constant Companion of St. *Paul*, for a good while, in his Preaching and Travels; so that of almost all the Things which he relates in his *History* of the *Acts of the Apostles* he might be, and of much the greatest part of them, 'tis most probable, and of some, 'tis certain, he was an *Eye* or *Ear-Witness*.

So then, There are *three* of the *five* *Historical* Books of the *New Testament* that were written by those who were present at most of the things which they have related, (*viz.* the *Gospels* of St. *Matthew* and St. *John*, and the *Acts of the Apostles*;) and another of them tho' it bears the Name of St. *Mark*, the Person by whom it was penned, yet if it was (as has been generally believ'd) dictated by St. *Peter*, may be added to that number, and be likewise reckon'd the Testimony of One who was an *Eye-Witness* of the things he has related.

In this Respect therefore the *Gospel History* is manifestly as credible as 'tis possible any History should be; for no Historian can record any thing upon better Assurance of its Truth than the Evidence of his own Senses.

But

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Luke i. 2, 3.

But the *Gospel* of St. *Luke*, it must be granted, is not of this sort; He himself does not pretend that the Matters by him recorded were of his own Knowledge; he only says, *He had perfect understanding of them from the very first, from those who from the Beginning were Eye-witnesses and Ministers of the Word.* And of some few Matters recorded by the other *Evangelists*, the same must likewise be granted (particularly of the things that were done before they were called to be *Apostles*; of these things I say, it must be granted) that 'tis most probable they were not Matters of their own Knowledge, that they recorded them only upon credible Information from others. But when 'tis consider'd on the other hand, that there are very few things related by St. *Luke* which are not to be found in some of the other *Gospels*, his *Testimony* that he had perfect Information of the things he has recorded from *several Eye-witnesses*, adds a Degree of Credibility even to the other *Gospels*, and is a good corroborating Evidence of their Truth; And all the Matters recorded by him, or the other *Evangelists* only upon Information of others, must be granted to be more credible than the Matter of most other ancient Histories of good Credit is, if we reflect upon what was said in the former Discourse concerning the *Nature* and *Circumstances* of the things recorded; particularly, that they were such things as might be most certainly known, and were capable of the best attestation; and that they were things done in the *same Age*, and in the *same Country* in which they lived who have written the History thereof.

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And what hath been said is, I hope, sufficient to shew the good Capacity the Authors of the *Historical* Parts of the *New Testament* were in to know the Truth of the Things they have recorded; most of them being such as 'tis probable three of the *Evangelists* (as Two of them, without all Dispute) were Eye witnesses of, and the rest such as they might have certain Information of from several Persons then alive, and well able to witness the same.

Of the Ability then of these Authors to write a true History of these Matters, I think, there can be no reasonable Doubt; And that there is as little Reason to doubt of their *Honesty* and *Faithfulness*, will in Part appear; if we consider in the third Place,

(3.) The strong Obligations they were under to write nothing but the Truth, according to the best of their Knowledge or Information.

Now the Obligations that Men are under to speak or write Truth may be reduc'd to two Heads, *Honour* and *Conscience*; By both which the *Evangelical Writers* were more strongly obliged to Truth in their Relations than commonly other Historians are.

1. One Obligation that lies on all Men to speak or write nothing but what is true, is *Honour*. For there is nothing that is generally accounted more base or dishonourable than to tell a Lye; there is nothing that by those who stand most upon their Honour is thought more reflecting and disparaging, and more necessary to be repented as an high Affront than to have the Lye given them.

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Serm.

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What therefore is generally thought to be a great Reproach it may reasonably be presumed (unless the contrary appears) a Man will be careful to avoid, by not giving any just Occasion to have it cast upon him.

And this is one Ground of that great Credit that is generally given to ancient Histories; 'tis presum'd, (unless there be evident cause to think otherwise) that the Authors of them were Men of so much *Honour*, and that they had such a Sense of the Reproach and Discredit that it would be to them to be found out in a Lye, as made them careful not to record any thing as a certain Truth, but what they had good Knowledge or Information of.

But that this *Obligation* to Truth was stronger on the *Authors* of the *Evangelical History*, than on most other Historians is abundantly evident from what was noted the last time concerning the *Nature* and *Conditions* of the things by them related, and of their *History* of them.

For the Matter of most other ancient Histories is such, that the Historians might report many things untruly or upon slight Information, and yet be pretty well assur'd that they should not be reputed Liars; because the Matters recorded by them being things either done in some *Places* a good way off, or in some *time* long before, or in the Presence of but few Persons, they might know that none of those into whose Hands their Histories would fall would be in a Capacity to contradict them tho' they were false; Or they might reasonably suppose that their Readers

Serm. would rather acquiesce in their Report, than  
 V. travel so far or take so much Pains as they  
 must have done to disprove it; especially if  
 it was a Matter of no great Consequence to  
 their Readers whether their Report was true  
 or false.

But in the *Gospel History* the Case was quite otherwise, and the Historians themselves could not but know that it was so. For there were a great many concern'd to find out some Falsity in it, and there were a great many that would have taken any Pains to have done it; and yet the Matters related by the *Evangelists*, and their Manner of relating them were such, that their History, if it had been false in any particular, might have been disproved with the greatest Ease, without being at any Pains to do it; because most of those into whose Hands it first came, would either have known it to be false, or would readily have been told that it was so, by abundance of Persons that could of their own Knowledge have contradicted it. So that if it be supposed that the *Evangelists* had any Regard at all to their own *Reputation*, it can't be imagin'd either that they did record any thing contrary to their Knowledge, or that in Matters that were not of their own Knowledge they neglected to get the best Information and Intelligence that could be had; because if they had done either of these, they could not have been so vain as to hope to escape being Censured as the most notorious and shameless Liars that ever wrote. But,

2. The strongest *Obligation* that lies on all Men to speak or write nothing but the Truth,  
 is

is *Conscience*; And the Sense that all Men are supposed to have of the natural Turpitude of a Lye, is the chief ground of that very great Credit that we give to humane Testimony in Cases of the greatest Concern and Consequence.

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But this *Obligation* to Truth was likewise stronger on the Authors of the *Evangelical History* than on most other Historians; 'twas indeed so very strong, that nothing less than an evident Proof of their Falsity can justify the entertaining so much as a Suspicion of it.

For to speak and write the Truth was what they were obliged to, not only by the Law of Nature, to which all Men are alike subject, but also by the Rules of that Religion which they had been bred up in; (by which they had been expressly forbidden to *lye one to another*, and by which they had been taught that a *False Witness that speaketh Lyes is an Abomination to the Lord*) and especially by the strict Command of him whom they had lately taken for their Master, and whose Laws and Religion they were to preach and propagate in the World, by which they were obliged, and under the severest Penalty, no less than Eternal Damnation, *to put away all Lying, and to speak every Man the Truth to his Neighbour.*

Lev. xix. 11.  
Pro. vi. 16, 19.

Eph. iv. 25.  
Rev. xxi. 8.

The *Subject Matter* of their Relation did also lay upon them the strongest *Obligation* to have a strict Regard to Truth in every thing that they wrote. For if it be a Sin to speak an Untruth in any *common* Matter, it is manifestly a greater Sin to do it in *grave and serious* Things, when Truth is most expected;



Serm. and especially in *Matters of Religion*, where-  
 V. in a Lye is most unbecoming; And if it be  
 a Sin to utter a Slander, or to tell a Lye of  
 a *Man*, it is evidently a Sin of a more heinous  
 Nature, to report an Untruth concerning  
 GOD, and to utter a Falshood in the  
*Name of GOD*; And if to lead Men into  
 any *Mistake* by a false Relation be a Practice  
 not to be justified, altho' the Mistake they  
 are led into be of no hurtful Consequence  
 either to themselves or to the World, it is  
 evidently a great Aggravation of the Lye if  
 Men are thereby deceived in a Case of the  
*nearest and dearest* Concern to them, if they  
 are led thereby into an Error that may prove  
*fatal* to them to all Eternity; And lastly, If  
 it be a very great Sin, only *once* to speak an  
 Untruth that may be prejudicial to *one* Man,  
 it is plainly the greatest and the most unpardonable  
 Sin of this kind to *record* an Untruth,  
 with a Design thereby to deceive to their  
 Everlasting Destruction *all the Men* that shall  
 ever be born into the World in all future  
 Ages.

If therefore the *Gospel History* be false, there  
 was manifestly such a *Complication* of most  
 horrid *Wickedness* in the Publishers and Com-  
 pilers of it, as it is not fair to suppose even  
 one single Man would be guilty of; and much  
 less can it be reasonably supposed that *several*  
 Men (*viz.* not only the *Four Evangelists*, but  
 all the other *Apostles* who Preached the same  
 things that they wrote) did consent to the  
 reporting of so many, and such *notorious* and  
 hurtful Untruths.

But this, it may be it will be said, is not a direct Proof that the *Evangelists* were true and faithful in their Relations, but only a *probable ground* of presuming that they were so. And I grant it is no more, But nevertheless, I think, if nothing more could be offered, this alone wou'd be sufficient to render their Testimony highly credible, so long as nothing is alledged on the other side to disprove it; And in all other Cases we allow it to be so. For by the Testimony of Persons of whose Truth we have no other Assurance but such a *probable Presumption*, all Questions and Controversies of the greatest Concern, relating to the Lives and Estates of Men, are in this World finally decided; every Man that bears Witness in any such Case being, by the common Judgment of Mankind, taken and accepted as a good Witness, unless the contrary appears; And by the Testimony of *two or three* such Witnesses we all consent that *every Matter* should be established.

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But then I add further, that besides this *reasonable Presumption* of the Truth of the *Witnesses* of the *Gospel History*, (which is all that we ordinarily have, or do desire in other Cases) there is as good *positive Proof* of their Truth as can be required. And this was the next Thing propos'd to be consider'd, viz.

(4.) The good *Evidences* that we have of their *Honesty* and *Faithfulness*.

And here it may be noted, (for tho' it be a thing that we lay no great stress upon in this Case, yet I think 'tis not to be omitted,

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because 'tis one of the best Evidences that we can have of the Faithfulness of any Historian whose Personal Character is unknown to us) that the Authors of the *Evangelical History* seem to have related all Matters with the greatest *Impartiality*; that they seem as free in telling the things that were, or might be accounted *disgraceful* to their Master or themselves, as in telling those things that were most *glorious* and *reputable*. For thus, in their History of the Life of *Christ*, as they tell us the wonderfulness of his Birth, the many Miracles that he wrought, the Testimony that was given him by the Descent of the *Holy Ghost* upon him, and by the Voice of *GOD*, his Glorious Resurrection from the Dead, and Ascension into Heaven; so they stick not to tell us also the *Meanness* of his Parentage, the *Obscurity* of his Birth, his *poor* and *low* Condition in the World, the *Affronts* that were given him, the *Contempt* he was had in, and the shameful *Death* he was put to. And of themselves, They have left it upon Record to all Posterity, that they were of the *meanest* Extraction, and bred up to very *poor* or *scandalous* Employments, that they were *Fisher-Men*, *Tent-Makers*, *Publicans*; They own that they were *ignorant* and *unlearned* Men; they tell their own *Childish Mistakes* about the Nature of the Kingdom of the *Messiah*; they mention their own *foolish* and *ambitious Conventions* with one another about worldly Greatness; they confess their own *Baseness* and *Cowardice* in forsaking their Master when in Danger, after the most solemn Profession of Friendship, and repeated Assurances of Stedfastness and



and Fidelity. St. Peter's Denial of Christ is a thing noted by all the *Evangelists*, and by St. Peter himself (if the Gospel of St. Mark be accounted *his*) is told with its *worst* Circumstances; and St. Paul freely owns that before his Conversion to Christianity he was a *Blasphemer*, a *Persecutor*, and *injurious*, and the *chief of Sinners*. Now their Recording such things as these concerning their Master and themselves, as it is an Evidence of their *Impartiality*, is consequently a good Argument of the Truth of their History; for had they allowed themselves a Liberty of varying from the Truth in any particular, it cannot be imagin'd but that they would at least have concealed their own Frailties and Infirmities; it can't be suppos'd they would have furnished their Adversaries with Matter wherewith to reproach them.

But 'tis possible that an Historian who means to deceive his Readers in some Matter of greater Moment, may purposely insert some few such Passages as these, thereby to gain to himself an easier Belief in other Things, and to cover his wicked Design. 'Tis therefore *another* and a *better Evidence* of the Truth of the Gospel History, that the *Evangelists* and other Witnesses of the Facts recorded in the Gospels, were Persons not liable to any just suspicion of Unfaithfulness in their Relations; because whatever they had been before, they were then in all other Respects Persons of a very good Character. *Ye are Witnesses* (says the *Apostle*) *and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved our selves among you.* They that could not be charged with any other Crimes were not justly to be suspected guilty of

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1 Thes. ii. 10.

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of *Forgery* and *Lying*. And we have abundant Reason to believe that they were in all other Respects unblameable, because there is no Evidence that they were ever charged at all, (either truly or falsely) even by their greatest Enemies, with any other Fault but only too great Zeal and Industry in propagating their Religion. And 'tis no Wonder that this should be thought a Fault by those who were of another Religion; or that by the Powers that then were, who endeavoured with all their might to suppress the Growth of Christianity, the *Apostles* who were so zealous to spread it should be looked upon as *disaffected* to their *Government* and *Movers* of *Sedition*; But however, this, if it had been a Fault, was not such a Crime as could justly have render'd their Honesty suspected, but on the contrary, it was rather a very good Argument that however they might possibly be mistaken, yet they did believe themselves; 'tis a fair Proof that they thought they had good Evidence of the things they testified, and that they reckoned themselves under a strict Obligation to testify the same.

For 'tis plain (and that's another good Argument of their Veracity) that they could have no *Worldly End* or *Design* either in the Framing or Publishing of those Stories which they related; so that if they were *Fables* which they told, they were far from being *cunningly devised Fables*, because, as the World then was, they could not have been so vain as to hope to raise themselves either to *Honour* or *Wealth* by preaching a *Crucified Messiah*, to the *Jews* a *Stumbling Block*, and to the *Greeks*, *Foolishness*. Now 'tis not to be supposed that any Man will  
frame

frame or report a Lye for *nothing*; Whoever knowingly deceives another, must be supposed to intend some Advantage to himself thereby; And therefore if there be no Untruth appearing in the Relation, and no Gain or other Advantage that the Reporter can be supposed to make to himself by it, it may very reasonably be presumed that the Report is true. But so far was this, if it was a Lye, from being a profitable and advantageous Lye to the Forgers and Reporters of it, that on the contrary it was, and they could not but readily foresee that it would be, very *prejudicial* to their Worldly Interests, exposing them to all sorts of Persecutions from all sorts of Men; For both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and every Sect and Party of every other Religion, however hating one another with a mortal Hatred, readily joined together to persecute the *Christians*, and those above all others who were the *Witnesses* of *Christianity*, the *Ringleaders* (as they called them) of the *Sett of the Nazareens*.

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This therefore may be reckon'd *another Evidence* of their Truth; (and as 'tis a stronger Evidence of Truth than any that has been yet mentioned, so 'tis such an one as I believe no History in the World has, but that of the Gospel) *viz.* That no *Threats* or *Punishments* could move the *Witnesses* of those things that are recorded in the *Evangelical History* so much as to *desist* from giving fresh Testimony to the Truth of the Things which they had once related. For this seems to have been all that was ever required or expected from them; not that they should retract the Testimony they had given, but only that they should *not speak*



Serm. *Speak or teach any more in the Name of Jesus;*

V.

*And upon this Condition alone any of them might have expected both a Pardon for what he had done before, and likewise all fitting Favour and Encouragement. But this was what*

Acts iv. 18.

v. 46.

*they all refused to do, giving no other Reason of their Refusal but this, that they were very sure of the Truth of the things they had spoken, and that there was a necessity laid upon them*

Acts iv. 19.

30.

*to preach the Gospel. Whether, say they, it be right in the sight of GOD, to hearken unto you more than unto GOD, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. And the more they were threatned to hold their Peace, so much the more boldly did they speak, not only filling Jerusalem with their Doctrine, but likewise spreading the same in all the World. And tho' they knew that in every City where they came Bonds and Afflictions did abide them; None of these things moved them, neither did they count their Lives dear unto themselves, so that they might finish their Course with Joy, and the Ministry which they had receiv'd of the Lord Jesus, to testifie the Gospel of the Grace of GOD.*

Acts xx. 23.

34.

*And if these Proofs and Evidences already mentioned of the Truth and Faithfulness of the Apostles and Evangelists are not thought sufficient to gain them Credit, what is there that would be sufficient? for more Evidence, or better Proof cannot reasonably be desired, so good is very rarely to be met with, or expected; And indeed I think there is but only one stronger Proof thereof that can ever possibly be given by Men; And that is when a Witness lays down his Life to confirm the Testimony he has given;*

for

for if when a Man has witnessed any thing, and is questioned for it, and threatned with *Death* if he persists in it, he still continues boldly to testify the same thing; and especially if when upon the *Rack* or on the *Cross*, in the midst of the *sharpest Torments*, and even at the Hour of his *Death*, he Justifies the Truth of his former Testimony, he certainly gives the *best Assurance* that 'tis possible for any Man to give of his *Honesty* and *Truth*; And if any humane Testimony be credible, this is certainly so in the highest Degree.

That therefore our Belief of the Gospel might be built upon the surest grounds, it pleased the Divine Wisdom so to Order it, that all those who were the first Witnesses thereof to the World should give likewise this best possible Proof of their Veracity. For of all the *Apostles* and *Evangelists* of the manner of whose Death there is any Memory preserved either by History or Tradition, St. *John* is the only Person that did not seal the Testimony he had given with his Blood; And that he did not suffer *Martyrdom* as well as the Rest was not occasioned by his *forbearing* to repeat the Testimony he had before given, and much less by his *Retracting* it, but was meerly an Act of Divine and *Miraculous Providence*, whereby tho' he was put into a *Cauldron* of *Boyling Oyl*, his Life was preserv'd; so that in Truth, considering the Hazard he ran of his Life, which could not have been saved but by a Miracle, he may very well be accounted a *Martyr* for the *Testimony* of *Jesus*, no less than the other *Apostles*, altho' he did not actually *expire* under his *Sufferings* as they did.

Now

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V.



Job ii. 4.

Now if it be supposed that a Man, especially one who stands much upon his Credit, may be willing, after he has told a Lye, to suffer a great Deal rather than own himself a Lyar; (tho' I think it cannot reasonably be supposed, either that *any Man* would suffer so many other great Evils as the *Apostles* did, only upon a Point of *Honour*; or that the *Apostles* did stand so much upon their *Honour*) yet when it is brought to this, that a Man who has told a Lye must either *retract* it, or *die* for it, and that he may in all Probability save his Life by retracting it, it is not to be supposed that any Man will be a *Martyr* for a *known Falsheid*; for it is a very true Saying, and to which there is hardly any Exception, tho' it was spoken by the Father of Lyes, that *Skin for Skin, yea all that a Man hath he will give for his Life.* 'Tis not credible therefore that so much as *one Man* should be found so foolish as to sacrifice his Life to a known Lye, and that too an *unprofitable* Lye, to himself, to his Family, and to all the World; and this only to save his *Reputation*; It is much less credible that so many Men, *viz. all the Apostles and Evangelists*, and most if not all the rest of our *Lord's* immediate *Disciples* should be guilty of such prodigious and unheard of Folly; and it is least of all credible that among so many as there were that bore Witness of the Facts recorded in the *Evangelical History*, not so much as *one Man* should be found that was *honestest* and *wiser* than the rest; not *one* that could be persuaded to give *Glory* to *GOD* by the *Confession* of his Fault, and *satisfaction* to the *World*, by a publick owning of the Cheat

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he had been engaged in; not *one* that wou'd chuse to undergo the Disgrace of a Lyar rather than the shameful Death of a Malefactor.

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These are in short the *Evidences* we have of the *Honesty* and *Faithfulness* of the *Evangelical Historians*, those Evidences I mean which they themselves have given thereof; and they are plainly as good as could be desired, they are the best that could be given by Men.

And putting together all that hath been said on this and the foregoing Heads, now, and in my last Discourse, for the Proof of the Truth of the *Evangelical History*, I think we may truly and confidently affirm, that altho' we consider it only as a meer *humane History*, we have much greater Reason to give Credit to it than to any History in the World besides.

But if we receive the witness of Men, (and who is there that does not?) the Witness of GOD is greater; and therefore in Order to shew further that there is sufficient Reason to give full Credit to the *Evangelical Historians* in their Relations of those Matters of Fact which they have recorded, I proposed to be considered, in the Fifth and last Place,

(5.) The Confirmation that was given to the Truth of their History, by GOD himself. For what St. Paul says of his own, was likewise true of the Speech and Preaching of all the other Apostles; viz. That it was in Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power; that the Faith of their Hearers should not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of GOD. And so St. Luke says; Acts iv. 33. With great Power gave

1 John v. 9.

1 Cor. ii.

4. 5.

**Serm.** *gave the Apostles Witness of the Resurrection of*  
**V.** *the Lord Jesus. For at the same Time that*  
 they Witnessed the Miracles of their Master,  
 they gave Assurance to Men of the Truth of  
 their Testimony by doing the like Miracles  
 themselves, healing the Sick, casting out De-  
 vils, raising the Dead, &c. just as Jesus him-  
 self had done. And at the same time that,  
 pursuant to their Commission, they preached  
 the Gospel to Men of all Nations and Lan-  
 guages, they plainly demonstrated, both that  
 they had such a Commission from GOD, and  
 that it was the Truth of GOD which they  
 preached, by speaking to every Man of every  
 Nation in his own Tongue.

Thus, as the Author to the Hebrews says,  
 Heb. ii. 4. GOD did bear them Witness both with Signs  
 and Wonders, and with divers Miracles and Gifts  
 of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will.  
 And he might well say, that GOD did here-  
 by bear them Witness, because that Power  
 Luke xxiv. 49. wherewith they were endued was so evident-  
 ly from on high, that none that saw their  
 Works, and considered withall the Purity and  
 Excellence of the Doctrine of Christianity  
 that was thereby establish'd, could have any  
 reasonable Doubt whether they were done by  
 the Power of GOD or no. We know, said  
 John iii. 2. Nicodemus to our Saviour, that thou art a  
 Teacher sent from GOD, for no Man can do  
 the Miracles that thou doest, except GOD be  
 with him: But the same Works that Jesus did,  
 Joh. xiv. 12. did his Disciples also, after he had sent down  
 the Promise of his Father upon them, on the  
 Day of Pentecost; yea and greater Works than  
 those did they do; so that whoever beheld  
 their

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their Works, might (so far as Miracles are Evidences of a Divine Power) be rather more certain that GOD *was with them*, than *Nicodemus* could be, that he was with our *Lord himself*. For tho' their other Miracles, that were of the same sort with those which our *Saviour* had done, were such Proofs of Divine Assistance as could not, with any Reason be gainsaid; yet, I think it may truly be affirm'd, that the *Gift of Tongues*, which was peculiar to them, and wherein they did (as we may say) excel even our *Lord himself*, was more convincing than any of them; For he that saw one of their other Miracles might possibly entertain some little Doubt whether the Effect that appeared to him to be Miraculous might not yet be done by some secret Power of Natural Causes that was unknown to him; But we all know the Power of Nature so well, that we are sure, the Knowledge of a Language cannot possibly be attained Naturally, even by a Person of the quickest Parts and faithfullest Memory, but in so much time, at the least, as it will necessarily take up to be told by Tutors, or to learn from *Lexicons*, what every particular Word of the Language to be learnt, is by the People of that Language designed to signify; because Words have not a Natural Relation to the Notions or Things thereby expressed, but are meer *arbitrary* Signs thereof. So that whoever knew the Education of the *Apostles*, and that they were before altogether ignorant and *unlearned*, and yet saw them every one, on a sudden, on the Day of *Pentecost*, able to speak readily in all the Lan-

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Serm. V.  guages of all the Nations under Heaven, from whence had come some of the *Jews* that were present at *Jerusalem* at that time, could have no possible Doubt of their Supernatural Assistance; They that heard them speak with *Tongues*, which they had never learned, could not but conclude that it was the *Spirit* that gave them this Utterance, because nothing else could give it; So that this was not only (as their other Miracles were) a Proof of Inspiration, but likewise an Instance and Example of it; It was a Proof of an inward and invisible Inspiration, by an Inspiration that was (as I may say) outward and visible; by an Inspiration that was discernible even by the Bodily Senses of all those that were present.

Acts ii. 4.

But be it so, perhaps the *Infidels* will say, that they that saw the *Miracles* which the *Apostles* are reported to have done in the Name of *Christ*, had Reason enough to believe their Testimony concerning him, and as well that which they have left in Writing, as that which they gave by Word of Mouth; Yet what's this to us that live now? For we neither saw the *Miracles* that they wrought, nor heard them speaking with *Tongues*, neither have we any Assurance that they ever did either the one or the other but only from themselves. They indeed tell us that they did a great many wonderful things (such as we are willing enough to grant could not be done but by the Power of God) in Confirmation of their Testimony concerning *Jesus*; But we see no more Reason to believe their Testimony concerning themselves, than there is to believe their other Testimony concern-

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ing him ; so that this cannot in reason be reckoned a Proof or Confirmation of *that* ; Nay, rather, we think they are less credible Witnesses in their own Case than they were in his. So that to us the *History* of the *New Testament* (granting it to be written by the *Apostles*) is of no more Authority than their Writing it (considered only with respect to their Natural and Moral Capacities and Qualifications) could give to it ; Because that Seal of *Miracles* which is said to have been affixed thereto by God, is now, by length of Time quite worn off ; or at least the Impression thereof is now so defaced, that we cannot distinguish *whose* Seal it was, or whether it was a *true* Seal or a *counterfeit* one ; And that this Seal was ever affixed to their Testimony, is testified only by those same Witnesses, whose the Testimony it self was.

To this Objection therefore (which, it must be confessed, has some Appearance of Weight and Reason in it) I answer,

1. By denying the Ground it is built upon, viz. That the Testimony of the *Apostles* themselves is the *only* Proof we have of the *Miracles* which they wrought for the Confirmation of their Testimony concerning *Jesus*. For besides the Testimony of the *Apostles*, in their *Epistles*, and in the *Acts*, Witnessing their own *Miracles*, we have likewise the Testimony of all the other *Christian Writers*, whose Books are preserved, that lived in or near the *Apostles* Times, Witnessing the same Thing ; And this Testimony, not only given as it were in secret, in order to the making Proselytes of such as they found to be easie and credulous ;

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Serm. but in the most publick manner, in those *Apo-*  
 V. *logies* for the *Christian* Faith which they pre-  
 sented to *Magistrates*, and published to the  
 whole *World*; in which, for Proof that these  
*Miracles* had been wrought by the *Apostles*,  
 they appeal to all the Histories and Records  
 of the *Apostles* Times then extant; in which,  
 they challenge any that could do it, to con-  
 tradict their Testimony; in which, they tes-  
 tifie that the same Miraculous Power did still  
 continue in the *Christian Church*, and was  
 sometimes exerted, often enough, and openly  
 enough to prove its being, tho' not so fre-  
 quently as it had been by the *Apostles* them-  
 selves, when there was more need of shew-  
 ing it, *viz.* at their first Preaching of the  
 Gospel.

Now these things, if they had not been  
 true, the first *Christians*, in the Circumstances  
 they were then in, would not have dared to  
 affirm; and if they had been false, they might  
 easily have been disproved, and they would  
 most certainly have been at least boldly de-  
 nied and contradicted by the profess'd Ad-  
 versaries of the *Christian* Faith. But they did  
 not deny or contradict, they did not offer to  
 disprove the Report that was then generally  
 believed of the *Miracles* that had been done  
 by the *Apostles*. Nay so far were they from  
 this, that there is good Evidence from Anti-  
 quity still remaining, that several even of those  
 who took upon them to oppose the *Christian*  
 Doctrine did yet expressly own that great and  
 mighty Works had indeed been done by the  
 Hands of the *Apostles*, as well as of their  
 Master; But then they had been done, they  
 said,



said, (and that was all they could say in the Case) by *Magick Art*, by the *Help* of the *Devil*; just as the *Jews* had said before of our *Saviour*, Mat. xii. 24. *This Fellow doth not cast out Devils, but by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils.*

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I shall not stay now to shew how groundless as well as malicious this Suggestion was with reference both to our *Lord's* Miracles and to *theirs*, because I suppose I shall have a better Occasion to do it hereafter in my next Discourse; 'tis enough for my present Purpose, if the Matter of Fact only be granted, viz. that the *Apostles* did do many *Miracles* in the Name of *Christ*, and to confirm their Testimony concerning him; And that they did so, cannot, I say, be reasonably doubted, because 'tis witnessed not only by *themselves*, but by all the *Christian Writers* of those or the succeeding Times, and is not denied, nay is granted, even by their *Adversaries* and *Opposers*. But,

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2. If we had not so good Proof of the *Miracles* done by the *Apostles*, if there were no Witnesses thereof but themselves, I say however that their Testimony alone would be very credible; Nay indeed the Thing testified by them must, I think, necessarily have been acknowledged by us, altho' there had been no History or Record at all of it transmitted to our Times. I do not mean that without the Light of History we could have known that they did just those very *Miracles* which are recorded, but I say that without this we might have known in general that they did do *Miracles*, or that they were as-

Serm. V. fisted by a *Supernatural Power*; (This, I say, we might have been sure of) by the *permanent Effects* of such a *Power*, continuing after their *Times*, and testified by all *Historians*, *Heathen* as well as *Christian*, of all *Ages* ever since; and which are even still extant and visible.

For that a great Part of the World is now *Christian* we see and know, and that it has been so for many *Ages* past we are as sure as we are that there have been any *Ages* past before our own; And looking back to see when and how it came to be so, we learn, by the concurrent Testimony of all History, *Jewish*, *Pagan* and *Christian*, that *Christianity* had its Beginning in *Judea*, just at that Time in which the Sacred History places it; And by the same concurrent Testimony of all History we learn that in a very short time, in less than forty Years after, it was Preached in all the Provinces of the *Roman Empire*, and in all other Countries of the World that were then known, and of which we have any History left; and that wherever it was Preached it made a very swift Progress, insomuch that in a few Years the number of *Christians* became very considerable and bare a great Proportion to the People of all other Religions; For it was not much above threescore Years after the *Apostles* had dispersed themselves in order to Preach the Gospel to the *Gentiles*, when *Pliny* Proconsul of *Bythinia*, wrote that *Epistle* to the Emperor *Trajan*, wherein giving an Account of the *Christians* then under a severe Persecution for their Religion by the Emperor's Order, he tells him that there was a

great

great number of Men obnoxious to Sufferings upon that Account ; that many of all Ages, of all Orders and Degrees, and of both Sexes were every Day called in Question for it ; that the Contagion of that Superstition (as he calls it) had spread it self not only in great Cities, but also in Towns and Country Villages, insomuch that the Temples of the Heathen Gods, had for some Time before been in a manner desolate, and their Worship and Sacrifices intermitted. Serm. V.

Now this is certain that there can be no Effect without a Cause of sufficient Power to produce it ; And it was evidently impossible that *Christianity* should make so swift a Progress, and prevail so much in the World, as it did, in so short a time, only by Natural Means. For without good Skill in the Languages of the several Nations wherein the *Apostles* were to Preach the Gospel, it had been in vain for them to have gone about to Convert all Nations ; Or if they had attempted it, 'tis impossible it should have been with Success ; And how can it be conceived possible that *twelve grown Men*, who before understood not a word of any but their own Mother Tongue, and that perhaps not well, who had never been bred up to *Study*, and who were then past the proper *Age* of learning Languages, should yet be able in so short a time to become perfect Masters of all the *Languages* then in use in the World, so as to speak them readily and fluently, as if every one had been their own Native Tongue ? and that after this, they should have time enough still left to go and Preach the Gospel in all Countries ? So that the speedy Conversion to



Serm. Christianity of such a great number of Men  
V. in all Parts of the World by their Ministry,  
is a direct Proof of that *Gift of Tongues* wherewith we believe they were endued; And whoever can believe that they had *this Gift*, which was peculiar and extraordinary, and such as had never been heard of in the World before, may, I think, more easily believe all the other *Miracles* that they are reported to have done, which were not near so wonderful, which were such as had been done by other Prophets in former Times.

But suppose this Story of the *Gift of Tongues* to be false, and that indeed the *Apostles* were Men of such ready Natural *Parts* as to be able to learn all the *Languages* which they could have any use of in as few Days as it would have taken other Men Years to do it in; or else that they had in truth been bred up to the *Study of Languages* from their Childhood, and only 'concealed their Knowledge thereof until that famous Day of *Pentecost*, that so then it might be taken to be Miraculous; Yet what could *twelve Men* furnished with this excellent Skill, do by their own *Natural Power* only, towards the Conversion of the World to *Christianity* in so short a time?

For 'tis to be consider'd that the Religion which they were to Preach in the World was the most *contrary* that could be to the *Carnal Lusts and Passions* of Men; that it promis'd no *Worldly Greatness*, no Increase of Riches, no Enjoyment of Sensual Pleasures; but on the contrary taught all those that embrac'd it, to be mortified to all these Things, and not to set their Affections on any thing here below.

'Tis

'Tis to be consider'd also, that it propos'd to Men's Belief such Doctrines as to the carnal Minds of Men could not but appear *foolish* or *incredible*; As that the Eternal Son of GOD did for our sakes become Man, and take on him the *Form* of a *Servant*, that in that Form he submitted to be scornfully used, cruelly scourged, and at last barbarously Crucified as a vile Malefactor by his own Creatures; that this same *Jesus* was afterwards declared to be the Son of GOD with Power by the Resurrection from the Dead, that he was taken up into Heaven, seated at the right Hand of the Father, had all Power in Heaven and Earth committed to him, was ordered to be Worshiped and adored by all Men with the same Honour wherewith they honour the Father, and was appointed by GOD to be judge of the quick and dead, &c.

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'Tis to be consider'd likewise, that it was a Religion perfectly *destructive* of all other *Forms* of *Religion* then receiv'd or establish'd in the World; and upon that Account only must needs meet with the strongest Prejudices; all the Men it was preached to being before from their Childhood bred up, and already fixed in another way.

And lastly, 'tis to be consider'd further, that the *Facts* upon which this Religion was grounded, that is, by which the Divine Mission of the Lord *Jesus* was proved, *viz.* his *Miraculous Works*, were such as being above the known Power of Natural Causes were not like to be easily *credited*. That he healed the Sick, that he gave Sight to the Blind, Hearing to the Deaf, Speech to the Dumb, Feet to the Lame, and

Serm. and Strength to the Cripples; that he did cast  
 V. out Devils; that he rais'd the Dead, and all  
 these only with a Word's speaking; that he  
 fed sometimes great Multitudes of four or five  
 Thousand with only so much Bread and Fish  
 as to Appearance was not sufficient for Twenty  
 Men; and that after they were all satisfied,  
 there was more in Bulk left in Fragments than  
 there had been before in whole Provision; That  
 he walked on the Water as on dry Land; That  
 he had the Winds and Seas obedient to his  
 Command: And above all, that he Raised him-  
 self to Life after he had been three Days Dead;  
 These and such like were strange Stories to  
 be told to Men in order to persuade them to  
 take upon them a new Religion.

What then, I say, could *twelve Men*, tho'  
 never so well furnished naturally with Parts  
 and Learning and all other Endowments pro-  
 per to qualify them for such a Work, do to-  
 wards the persuading the World to embrace  
*Christianity*? Suppose they had gone (not as  
 they did, one into this Country, another into  
 that; often singly, seldom more than two in  
 Company; but) *all together* in a Body into some  
 one Country remote from *Judea*, and there with  
*concurrent Testimony* born Witnesses of the Things  
 they had seen and heard; yet who would have  
 believ'd their Report? The Report of Strang-  
 ers coming from a far Country, and of whose  
 Honesty and Truth they could have no Assu-  
 rance but only from themselves vouching for  
 one another? Who would have given Credit  
 to a Relation of such incredible Stories, told  
 with a Design to introduce a Religion that  
 was unknown to their Fathers? and such a ri-  
 diculous



diculous Religion too, as this, at the first Proposal, wou'd probably appear; viz. the Worshipping as G O D, a Man, who by their own Confession, was rejected and set at nought, and at last Crucified as a wicked Malefactor by his own Countrymen.

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Or if it can be supposed that the *Apostles*, by the Boldness of their Speech and the *enticing Words of Man's Wisdom*, might after some time have prevailed upon some few to become Profelytes to their Religion; yet the multitude of their Disciples could not have been very great, before the *Government* of the Country would have taken the Alarm, and have called in Question these *Setters forth of new Gods*, these *Movers of Sedition among the People*, as they would certainly have been accounted, and as, in fact, the *Apostles* were accounted in every place where they came. And this would quickly have put a stop to a growing *Sect*; They that liked the Religion well enough before, because it was new, would quickly have left off to like it when they saw it would be dangerous to profess it; 'tis not likely their Followers would have continued to stick to them, when they perceiv'd the Government and the whole Nation in general engaged on the other side, and resolved by all means possible to extirpate the Belief they had entertained; and when they saw their Preachers Imprisoned and Scourged, tortur'd and put to Death, they would quickly have deserted the Service of a *Master*, who, they would then readily think, was not of Power to *save* either himself from the *Cross*, or his *Disciples* from Suffering. And after this, had the *Residue* of the

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the *Apostles*, who might possibly have escaped Martyrdom in this Country, gone into another, there they must have expected the like Reception and Usage; and not better in a third; and so in a few Years their Lives would have spun out in doing nothing, and their Religion would have perish'd with themselves.

And if their united Testimony would have had so little Credit, much less can it be supposed that the *single Witness* of *One Apostle* only could ever have gain'd any Credit at all; And yet unless the Testimony of some single Witnesses had been believ'd, 'tis impossible there should have been, in so short a time, so great a Conversion of Men to *Christianity* in all parts of the World, by the Preaching of so few Men.

So that whoever believes that *Christianity* could make so swift and so great a Progress as 'tis certain by all History it did, only by the *Preaching* of the *Apostles* without any *Miraculous Gifts* or *Supernatural Assistance*, wants not Faith enough to be a Christian, if he had but a Will to it; for he believes already a much greater Miracle than any that is recorded in the *Evangelical Story*.

And now by all that hath been said, in this and the last Discourse, I hope it appears that there is *sufficient Reason* to give full Credit to the *Authors* of the *Historical Books* of the *New Testament* in their Relations of those Matters of Fact which they have recorded. This I'm sure I may say, that there is not so good Reason to give Credit to any History in the World besides, of the same Antiquity; And that a History

History so well confirmed as this is cannot reasonably be rejected, nor indeed any ways be discredited, but either by some other *more credible History* contradicting it, or by some *intrinsic Evidence* of Falshood.

But better or *more credible History* contradicting it, I have already observ'd, there is not; nor indeed is there any History contradicting it that is of sufficient Antiquity to disprove it. Nay there are many very considerable things of those recorded in the *Gospel History* that are occasionally mentioned by other *Historians* of those or the succeeding Times, who had no Design thereby to do any Service to *Christianity*; as namely that there was such a Man as *John the Baptist*, that he was a Person of great Piety and Austerity, and a Preacher of Righteousness, and that he was put to Death by *Herod*: That there was also a Man named *Jesus*, who called himself and was owned by many to be the *Christ*, that he did many wonderful things, and was at last Crucified by the *Jews*: The Names of some other Persons likewise spoken of in the *Gospel-History* are mention'd under the same Character in some other Histories, as *Pilate*, *Felix*, *Festus*, *Caiphas*, *Agrippa*, &c. In other Histories also we find notice taken of the Cruelty of *Herod* in slaying the Infants at *Bethlehem*, and among them (as 'tis thought) his own Son; which made *Augustus*, when the Story was told him, to say, that it was better to be *Herod's Swine* than his Son; and likewise of that remarkable Eclipse of the Sun, when the Moon was at the full, which the *Evangelists* say happen'd at the time of our Saviour's

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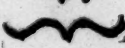
Serm. *Saviour's* Passion; and of that violent Earth-  
 V. quake that was at the same time; and lastly,  
 of the prodigious Increase of *Christianity* in all  
 Parts of the *Roman Empire*, soon after its first  
 Publication.

And if upon this Occasion it should be said that the Facts recorded in the *Evangelical History* and the Events that follow'd thereupon were so very wonderful and remarkable, that if they had been true they must in all probability have been *more* taken notice of than they are in other Histories; I answer, that supposing them to be true, it could not be reasonably expected that more mention should have been made of them by other Historians than there really is; because they were plainly foreign to their purpose, or else such Stories as tho' they had heard of them they did not believe, having perhaps never taken any pains to examine into the Truth of them. For what was it to the Purpose of an *Author* that was writing the *Life* of one of the *Roman Emperors*, or the History of some famous *War*, or giving an Account of the Affairs of the *Civil State*, to make a large Digression concerning a *Religious Sect* begun in *Judea* by a Person that was *despised* in his own Country, and carried on and continued by *mean* and *contemptible* Persons who made no Figure in the World? Or how could it be expected that an Historian who was not himself a *Christian* should yet give a large Account of the *Miracles* of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, and other Facts upon which our Religion is grounded; which had he believ'd (as he must be supposed to have done,

done, if he had deliver'd them to Posterity as Truths) he must have been a *Christian*? 'Tis enough in all Reason, and as much as could be expected in this Case (supposing these Facts to be true) that they are not by any Historians that were of another Religion, contradicted or attempted to be disprov'd: more than this would have been too much. And should we now in some ancient Manuscript History new brought to Light, and bearing the Name of some *Jewish* or *Heathen* Author, find a large and formal Account of any of those Facts relating to the *Christian* Religion that are recorded in the Gospel; this would give very just ground to suspect, that the whole History (whatever other Appearance it had of Truth) was forged and counterfeit, or at least that those Passages speaking honourably of the *Christian* Religion or the Author of it, were knavishly foisted into the Book by some *Christian* Transcriber. For this is indeed the best Argument that is brought to discredit some Passages of this kind that are now to be found in some *Heathen* or *Jewish* Historians, and particularly in *Josephus*, viz. that they say more than was proper or likely to be said by *Heathens* or *Jews*; that if those Passages are genuine, and the Authors had believed what they themselves wrote, they must have been *Christians*.

Now this I'm sure is not fair Dealing, that the *Paucity* and *slenderness* of those corroborating Testimonies to the Truth of the *Christian* History that are to be met with in other Historians, and that the *Multitude* and *Fulness* of such

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Serm. V. such Testimonies, should *both* be urged as Arguments against *Christianity*. And therefore when they are both urged (as they are and have been by our Adversaries) we may reasonably conclude that the Truth is in the Mean; and that there are indeed no *more*, nor no *fewer* Testimonies of this kind to be met with in other Writers, and that they are not either *more* or *less* to the Purpose, than (supposing the *Christian History* to be true) might fairly be expected.

It only remains then that we enquire whether there be in the *Gospel History*, any *intrinsic* Evidences of Falshood. And 'tis pretended by the Adversaries of our Religion, that there are many such; For there are, they say, some things related in the *Gospel History*, that are altogether *incredible*; and there is, they say, oftentimes great *Difference*, in the several Relations of the same Story, by the several *Evangelists*; And not only so, but there are, they say, besides, in their several Histories compared together, some flat *Contradictions* and *Repugnancies*.

I intended therefore at the End of this Discourse, if I had *had* time for it, to have spoken largely upon this Subject; But because I have not, must refer you to those Books that have been written on purpose to give an Account of the difficult Texts of Scripture, and to reconcile those that are seemingly repugnant: Or for want of such Books to any good Commentary on the Bible, in which you will hardly fail to meet with satisfaction in any Difficulty of this kind, if you read it with a Mind disposed



disposed to receive Satisfaction. And I shall conclude this Discourse with only observing in General,

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1. That the pretended *Impossibilities* that are said to be related in the Sacred History, are only *Difficulties*; They are indeed Events above and beyond the known Power and common Course of Nature, but they are such as are easily Credible when they are ascribed, as they must be, to the Almighty Power of God.

2. That the *Difference* that may sometimes be observ'd in the several Relations of the same Story by the several *Evangelists*, is very *inconsiderable*; consisting only in this, That one perhaps relates the Story in a different Order of things than another does; Or that One tells it briefly, another more at large; Or one with a few, another with more Circumstances; Or that some Circumstances are mentioned by each of them which the other had omitted. So that this Observation is so far from being a just Objection against the Truth of the History, that it is rather a *Proof* and *Confirmation* of it; For 'tis an Argument that the *Evangelists* did not conferr together in the Writing of their Histories, and that they did not Copy or Transcribe from one another; but that every one of them reported the Story he wrote in such manner as he himself remembred it to have been, and with such Circumstances as he himself took most notice of. And,

3. As to the *Repugnancies* and *Inconsistences* that are said to be in the *Evangelical History*;

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These

Serm. These we absolutely deny. I have not time  
 V. now to consider, or attempt to reconcile all  
 the Places that are pretended to be contradictory to each other, but those Passages which seem most liable to this Exception, are, I think, the Relation of Judas's Death, and the Account of our Saviour's Genealogy.

Mat. xxvii. 5.  
 Acts i. 18.

• ἀνίστατο.

But as to the first, There is plainly no Impossibility, no Contradiction in it, if we should say that after he had *hanged himself*, as St. Matthew says, he did *fall down*, and that *his Bowels gush'd out*. as St. Luke affirms; Or it may be that he did not hang himself, but only was \* *choaked* or suffocated by the violence of his Grief, and that the same Passion by which he was strangled made him also *fall down headlong and burst asunder in the midst so that all his Bowels gushed out*.

Deut. xxv. 5.

And as to the other, when 'tis remembered that by the Jewish Law the next of Kin was to raise up Seed to his near Relation that died without Issue, by Marrying his Widow, and that the First-born of the Woman after such second Marriage was reputed in Law the Son, as well as he was the Heir, of the Deceased; so that consequently the same Person might be the Legal Son of one Man, and the Natural Son of another Man; tho' it may be difficult, perhaps impossible for us at this Distance of Time, to say with Certainty which of the two different Lines by which our Saviour's Pedigree is deduced from David is the Legal, and which the Natural Line; it is very easie nevertheless to believe that one is the Legal and that the other

is the *Natural Line*. And if so, there is plainly no Contradiction between the two *Evangelists*, altho' St. *Matthew* makes our *Saviour* to be descended from *Solomon*, and St. *Luke* from *Nathan*, altho' St. *Matthew* says that *Joseph*, the Husband of the *Blessed Virgin* was the Son of *Jacob*, and St. *Luke* that he was the Son of *Heli*.

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Mat. i. 16.  
Luke iii. 23.

And now the *Truth* of the *Gospel History* being, as I hope, by what hath been said sufficiently established, I should proceed to shew, That if the Matters of Fact related in the New Testament are true, they are sufficient Proofs of the *Truth* and *Divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein Taught; But I am sensible that I have trespassed too much upon your Patience already, and so shall reserve this for the Subject of my next Discourse.



in the natural line. And it is there is plainly seen  
no communication between the two Kingdoms.  
But, although St. Paul makes out a case to  
be deduced from Solomon, and St. Paul  
from Isaiah, about St. Paul's case that  
he is the son of David, and so Paul that he was  
the son of David.  
I will now the terms of the Gospel Ministry  
as I hope, by what has been said  
I should proceed to  
show that if the matters of fact related  
in the New Testament are true, they are  
the very facts of the Jewish and Roman  
history of all the Jewish that are therein  
related. But I am sensible that I have  
expended too much upon your patience, al-  
though, and to shall reserve this for the sub-  
ject of my next discourse.

*The Sufficiency of the Scripture  
Revelation;*

*As to the Proof of it. PART III.*

THE  
Sixth SERMON,

Preach'd September 2<sup>d</sup>. 1700.

St LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses  
and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if  
one went unto them from the dead, they  
will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses  
and the Prophets, neither will they be per-  
swaded, though one rose from the dead.*

IN Order to shew that we have sufficient  
Reason given us to convince us of the  
Truth and Authority of the *New Testa-  
ment*, and of all the Doctrines that are taught  
by it, I have formerly propounded to shew,  
1. That we have sufficient Reason to believe

Serm. that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were  
 VI. written by those *Persons* who are said to be  
 the *Authors* thereof; 2. That there is *sufficient*  
*Reason* to give full *Credit* to them in their  
*Relation* of those *Matters of Fact* which they  
 have recorded; And, 3. That if the *Matters*  
 of *Fact* therein recorded are true, they are  
*sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and *Divine Au-*  
*thority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein  
 taught. And the two first of these Points I  
 have, I hope, already made good.

I proceed now to the third; viz.

3. To shew, That the *Doctrine* of the *Go-*  
*spel* is well grounded upon the *History* of it;  
 That if the *Matters of Fact* recorded in the  
*New Testament* are true, they are *sufficient*  
*Proofs* of the *Truth* and *Divine Authority* of  
 all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught.

And here, by the *Doctrines* of the *Gospel*,  
 I understand both the *Articles of Faith*, which  
 it proposes to our *Belief*, and the *Rules* which  
 it prescribes to our *Practice*. Many of the  
 former of which are themselves *Parts* of the  
*Gospel History*, as the *Incarnation*, *Life*, *Suf-*  
*ferings*, *Death*, *Resurrection* and *Ascension* of  
 our *Saviour*; and the rest, of both sorts, are  
 taught in the *New Testament*, either by our  
*Saviour* himself, or by his *Apostles*.

And I suppose it will be readily granted,  
 that all their *Doctrines* are true, and also of  
*divine Authority*, if it shall appear that they  
 were *commissioned* and *sent* by *GOD* to in-  
 struct the *World*; for he whom *GOD* hath  
 sent speaks the words of *GOD*, Joh. iii.



The single Point therefore to be consider'd at this time, is, whether there be sufficient Evidence, from the *Matters of Fact* recorded in the *History of the New Testament*, that our Saviour and his Apostles were commissioned and sent by GOD to instruct the World.

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And first, Whether there be sufficient Evidence from thence that our Saviour himself was a Teacher sent from GOD.

Now that he said he was sent from GOD, is a *Matter of Fact*, and a part of the Gospel History, Joh. xii. 49. I have not spoken of my self, but the Father which sent me, he gave me a Commandment what I should say, and what I should speak.

See Joh. v.  
37. 38. viii.  
38. xiv. 10.  
24.

And that he said that he was the Messiah which had been foretold by the Prophets, is likewise *Matter of Fact*, and a Part of the same History, Joh. iv. 25, 26. The Woman of Samaria saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh which is called Christ; when he is come, he will tell us all things; Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee, am HE.

Matth. xvi.  
16, 17.  
Mark ix. 41.  
Lu. xxiv. 46.  
Joh. ix. 47.

The Question therefore is, whether from the things which are recorded of him by the Evangelists, there be sufficient Ground to believe the Truth of either or both these Pretences; I say of either or both of them, because either of them is a sufficient Reason to receive his Doctrine as True and Divine. For which Cause therefore I shall not, in speaking to this Subject, distinguish between the Evidences which the Gospel History affords of his being a Prophet, and those which it affords of his being the Messiah, but shall propose them promiscuously as they come to mind.

M 4

And

Serm. VI. And here I shall consider, *First*, The *Credibility* of our *Saviour's* own *Testimony* concerning *himself*; and *Secondly*, The *Confirmation* that was given to this *Testimony* by *GOD*; grounding all that shall be said on both these *Heads*, upon the *Gospel History*; the *Truth* of which I now take for granted, as being, I hope, already sufficiently prov'd.

Serm. IV, V.

*First* then, I shall consider the *Credibility* of our *Saviour's* own *Testimony* concerning *himself*, when he said that he was sent by *GOD*, and that he was the *Christ* the *Son of GOD*.

And I know 'tis commonly said that a Man is not to be believed in his own Case. And this very thing was objected to our *Saviour* by the *Jews*, *Joh. viii. 13. Thou bearest Record of thy self, thy Record is not true.* But this Saying is not without Exception.

When indeed what a Man witnesses is for his own *Benefit*, his *Testimony*, if it be single, may reasonably be rejected; especially, if any Proof be made that at other times he hath told a *Lye*; or done any other *ill thing* for his *Advantage*; But otherwise a Man's *Testimony concerning himself* may be credible; nay in some cases it may be more credible than another Man's; because he may sometimes be *surer* of what he says concerning himself than another Man could be. And therefore our *Saviour*, who in *Joh. v. 31.* allows of the Reasonableness of that Saying; *If I bear witness of my self my Witness is not true*; yet when this very thing was afterwards objected to him by the *Pharisees*, in the Place before-cited, makes Answer in the following

following words; *Tho' I bear Record of my self, yet my Record is true, for I know whence I came,* &c. Serm. VI.

And that the Testimony of our Lord concerning his own divine Mission was such as we might rationally give Credit to, tho' we had no other Evidence of it, will, I suppose sufficiently appear, if these following things be consider'd. John viii. 14.

1. That his whole *Life* (according to the Account that is given of it by the *Evangelists*, which we now build upon, as true) was in all Respects *spotless* and *unblameable*; *He did no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth*; He was a *Lamb without blemish and without spot*. 1 Pet. ii. 22.  
1 Pet. i. 29. And this he himself urges as a Reason why his Testimony ought to be credited; *Joh. viii. 46. Which of you convinceth me of Sin? and if I say the Truth why do ye not believe me?* And a very good Reason it was; for it could not justly be suspected, that a Person of whom no other ill thing could be said, was yet indeed in the whole Course of his Life guilty of a Crime of the greatest Magnitude, *viz. of Lying in the Name of God*; of saying, that the Lord had sent him, when indeed the Lord had not sent him, nor spoken by him.

2. It may be also consider'd, that this *Testimony* of our Lord, tho' it was concerning himself, yet was not *for himself*; I mean it was not for his own worldly Advantage. And this Consideration he himself likewise offers to the *Jews*, as an Argument of the Truth of his Testimony, *Joh. vii. 18. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own Glory; but he that seeketh his Glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness*



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VI.



*is in him.* Had the Doctrine of our *Lord*, which he pretended was what GOD had commanded him to teach, been contrived to advance the Worldly Honour and Greatness of himself or his Followers, this would have been a just Prejudice against it, and a reasonable Ground of suspecting that he spake of himself; but when it was evident to all that heard his Discourses, (and is no less so to us that read them) that he sought not his own Glory in any thing, but the Glory of him that sent him, and that his whole Doctrine tended to advance the Honour of GOD, and to promote the Practice of Piety and Virtue in the World; this rendered his Testimony very credible, when he said he was *sent* by GOD to teach it to the World; for when a Doctrine is plainly worthy of GOD, and *according to Godliness*, it may reasonably be presumed that GOD is the Author of it.

1 Tim. vi. 3.

3. It may be further considered, that this Testimony of our *Lord* concerning himself was so far from being to his own Benefit, that it was as much as any thing could possibly be to to his *Worldly Disadvantage*; exposing him to the Envy and Malice of the *Jews*, and to the Jealousie of the *Romans*, and to all the cruel Sufferings which he endured from both of them. And certainly a Man's Testimony concerning himself may be allow'd to be credible if it be against his own Interest, if he himself be a great Loser or Sufferer by what he Testifies; for it can't be imagined what else but only the Evidence of Truth, and an Obligation to declare it, should ever induce a Man to say such things

con-

concerning himself, as will procure his own Serm.  
mischief. VI.

And I know not what can be said to avoid the Force of this Argument for the Truth of our Saviour's Testimony that he was sent from God, and that he was the *Messiah*, unless it be, that he was disappointed in his Expectation; and that he hoped to have made himself Rich and Great in the World by these Glorious Pretences, tho' in the Event it prov'd otherwise. But the *Gospel-History* furnishes us with a very clear and full Answer to this Objection in those many *Predictions* of our Lord therein recorded concerning his own Sufferings; whereby it clearly appears, that the Sufferings which befel him for giving this Testimony concerning himself did not happen to him *unexpectedly* but that he knew long before all that afterwards came to pass. And therefore I say again, that no Reason can be imagin'd why he should say that he was sent from God, but only because he knew it was true, and had receiv'd a Command from his Father to declare this Truth to the World. Especially if it be consider'd further—

Mat. xvi. 31.

—xx. 17.

4. Lastly, That he continu'd to testify the same at his *Death* which he had done before in his Life, giving thereby the best Assurance that a Man can give of the Truth of his Testimony. For the main Matter of his Accusation to *Pilate* was, that he had given out himself to be the *Messiah*, and the *Messiah* was (according to the Expectation of the *Jews*) to be a great Temporal King; had our Lord therefore but denied this Charge, had he but granted that he was not the *Messiah*, he might have

Serm. have saved his Life. But this he would not  
 VI. do; he disowned indeed the *false Notion* that  
 the *Jews* had of the *Messiah*; *my Kingdom*, says  
 Joh. xviii. 26. he, *is not of this World*; But that he was a *King*,  
 Matt. xxvii. 11. and that he was the *Messiah* he boldly owned,  
 Joh. xviii. 37. as well when the Question was put to him by  
 Matth. xxvi. the *Roman Governour* who had Power of Life  
 63, 64. and Death, as when it had been put to him  
 Mark xiv. before by the *High-Priest*. This therefore is  
 61, 62. a strong Confirmation of the Truth of this  
 Testimony of our *Lord*; and is alone sufficient  
 to make it credible, that he *witnessed* the same  
 good Confession before *Pontius Pilate*, which he  
 had done before his own Nation, and Sealed  
 his Witness with his Blood. For 'tis not to  
 be supposed that any Man tells a known Lye for  
 nothing; and it was plainly then too late for  
 him, to hope for any good to himself in this  
 World by persisting in this Testimony; (his  
 only Hope had been in retracting it) and 'tis  
 not credible that any Man should be so foolish  
 as to expect to better himself in the other  
 World, by dying with a Lye in his mouth.

Thus, I hope, it appears that the *Testimony*  
 of our *Lord* concerning his own *divine Mission*,  
 was *credible in it self*; so that we might ra-  
 tionally believe, that he *came from God*,  
 and that he was *Christ the Son of God*, al-  
 tho' we had *had* only his own Word for it.

But we have more than his own Word for  
 it; *I am not alone*, (says he, Joh. viii. 16, &c.)  
*but I and the Father that sent me*. It is also  
 written in your Law, that the *Testimony of two*  
*Men is true*; *I am one that bear Witness of my*  
*self, and the Father that sent me beareth Witness*  
*of me*. And this was the other thing I pro-  
 posed



posed to consider, in order to shew the good Reason that we have to believe that our Saviour was sent from GOD, and that he was the Messiah; viz.

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Secondly, The Confirmation that was given to this Testimony of our Lord, by GOD himself. And this was given several ways.

1. GOD bare him Witness by the Testimony of ancient Prophets; And to this our Saviour frequently appeals, *Joh. v. 39. Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have Eternal Life, and they are they which testify of me; And again, v. 46. Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me.* And this St. Peter (comparing it with that Voice from Heaven, testifying him to be the Son of GOD, of which he himself had been an Ear-witness) calls a more sure word of Prophecy. And indeed it was as certain an Evidence of his divine Mission as could be desired.

For it was a Matter of the greatest Concern to the World, to discern the promis'd Messiah, that so they might know in whom to Believe, and from whom to expect Salvation: And to this End GOD was pleased, by the mouth of all his holy Prophets since the World began, to give several Marks and Characters of the Messiah, by which he might be certainly known, and readily distinguish'd from all Impostors; for they foretold exactly the Time of his Coming, his Pedigree, and the Place of his Birth, the manner of his Life, the Things he was to do, the Sufferings he was to undergo, and all the remarkable Accidents that were to befall him in this World;

all

Serm. all which Predictions were punctually fulfill'd  
 VI. in the Person of our blessed Saviour, as must  
 be granted by every one that allows the truth  
 of the *Gospel History*. And this is an undeniable  
 Proof that he was the *Messiah*; for it is  
 manifestly inconsistent with the *Wisdom* of  
 GOD, when he meant to give *Marks* and  
*Characters* by which the *Messiah* might be cer-  
 tainly known, to give only such as might  
 belong to another Person no less than to him;  
 and it is no less inconsistent with his *Good-  
 ness* that his Providence should ever permit  
 that all the *Marks* and *Characters* of the true  
*Messiah* should meet together in an *Impostor*;  
 because by this, Mankind must have lain un-  
 der an inevitable Necessity of being cheated  
 in a Matter of the greatest Consequence to  
 their Eternal Salvation.

But the ancient Prophecies of *Christ* were  
 many of them in Types or Figurative Ex-  
 pressions, not readily to be understood 'till  
 they were accomplish'd, nor then very easie  
 to be applied by every one to the Person of  
 the true *Messiah* without the Help of a Teacher.  
*How can I understand what I read* (said the  
 'Acts viii. 31. Eunuch, even when he was reading one of  
 the plainest Prophecies of *Christ* that is in the  
*Old Testament*) *except some man should guide  
 me?* And therefore GOD was pleased to  
 give a yet more certain and distinct Know-  
 ledge of him to the Men of that Gene-  
 ration in which he appear'd; And this he  
 did——

2. By the Testimony of *John the Baptist*,  
 who was a burning and a shining Light; and  
 did not; as the former Prophets had done,  
 only

only lay down *Marks* and *Characters*, by the wise Application whereof Men might discern the *Messiah* when they saw him; but pointed to him, as it were with his *Finger*, as he stood before their *Eyes*, so that the simplest among them could not but know whom he meant; Behold, says he, the *Lamb of GOD*, *Joh. i. 29, 30;* which taketh away the *Sin of the World*. This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a Man which is preferred before me.

And to this *Testimony* of *John* our *Saviour* himself frequently appealed, as to a *Testimony* that was full to the purpose and could not be denied; Ye sent unto *John*, says he, and he bare witness unto the *Truth*, *Joh. v. 32.* And when the *Chief Priests* and *Elders* question'd him about his *Authority*, he perfectly confounded them by only asking them whether the *Baptism* of *John* was from *Heaven* or of *Men*; for that *John* was a *Prophet*, altho' he did no *Miracles*, was so evident to all by the wonderful manner of his *Birth*, and the miraculous *Circumstances* that attended it, that they could not, and he was also so generally receiv'd and accepted among the *People* as a *Prophet*, that they dared not deny it: If, say they, we shall say of *Men*, all the *People* will stone us, for they be persuaded that *John* was a *Prophet*; and yet had they granted this, which they could not deny, they had answer'd their own *Question*, and seen clearly by what *Authority* our *Saviour* acted and taught; for no *Testimony* of his divine *Mission* could be plainer and clearer than that of *John* was; and it was a thing granted by the *Jews*, that he is a *Prophet* without all doubt, and needs no farther

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Mat. xxi. 23;  
&c.



Serm. farther Trial, unto whom another Prophet bears  
VI. Witness.

3. Another way by which GOD gave Witness to our Saviour, that he was sent by him, and that he was the Messiah, was by a Voice from Heaven; which Testimony was given him three times.

Mat. iii. 16,

17

Mar. i. 10, 11.

Luke iii. 22.

First, at his Baptism, when being come up out of the water, the Heavens opened, and the Spirit like a Dove descended upon him, and there came a Voice from Heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And of this Voice 'tis highly probable St. John Baptist was an Ear-witness; for 'tis said expressly, that he saw the Spirit descending like a Dove from Heaven, and abiding on him, and that was at the same time that the Voice was utter'd.

John i. 32.

Ex. xxiv. 15,

&c.

Mat. xvii. 5.

Mar. ix. 7.

Luke ix. 35.

A Second time was at his Transfiguration on the Mount, when the Glory of GOD appearing in a Cloud, as it had anciently us'd to do, there came a Voice out of the Cloud which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him. And at the uttering of this Voice, three of his Apostles were present, two of which have witnessed the same to us under their own Hands.

2 Pet. i. 17.

John i. 14.

1 John v. 7.

A Third time was after the raising of Lazarus, when were present not only his Apostles who constantly accompanied him, but several others both Jews and Greeks. And this Voice was so loud as to be heard by all that were present, tho' not by all so distinctly and articulately, as it was by some, who, as 'tis probable were nearer than the rest; which was the occasion of that Difference

Joh. xii. 20,

28.

ence

rence that was among the People concerning **Serm.**  
 it; some saying that it Thundered, and others, **VI.**  
 that an Angel spake to him. To doubt there-  
 fore of his divine Mission whom GOD thus **Ver. 29.**  
 testified to by Voices from Heaven, is to make  
 GOD himself a Lyar, as the Apostle speaks,  
 because we receive not the Record that he gave **1 Joh. v. 10.**  
 of his Son.

4. Another way by which GOD gave Wit-  
 nesses to the Divine Mission of our Saviour was  
 by enduing him with the Gift of Prophecy, or  
 foretelling things to come. Several Instances **Mat. xvi. 21.**  
 of which we meet with in the Gospel-History; **xx. 17, &c.**  
 for he foretold very often his own Sufferings **Mark ix. 31.**  
 and Death, with all the remarkable Circum- **x. 33.**  
 stances thereof; He said that he should be  
 betray'd by one of his own Disciples, when **Mat. xxvi. 21.**  
 none of them suspected that there was a false **John vi. 70.**  
 Brother among them, and the Traytor himself  
 knew not yet the falseness of his own Heart;  
 He told Peter but a few Hours before, that he **Mat. xxvi. 34.**  
 should deny him thrice; when He at the same  
 time was very confident of his own strength,  
 and declar'd himself resolv'd to die rather  
 than deny him once; He told the rest of the **Mat. xxvi. 31 ;**  
 Disciples that they would all forsake him, when  
 they every one profess'd themselves resolv'd  
 to suffer with him, rather than leave him;  
 He signified before by what Death he should **Joh. iii. 14.**  
 die, and who should be instrumental therein; **viii. 28. xii.**  
 He assured his Disciples that after three Days **32.**  
 he would rise again, and appointed them a **Mat. xvi. 21.**  
 place in Galilee, where they should all see him; **xxvi. 32. 3**  
 He Prophesied that notwithstanding the Con- **xxviii. 16.**  
 tempt he was had in, and the greater Con-  
 tempt that his ignominious Death would bring  
 N upon

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Mat. xxiv. 14.

iii. 19.

Mat. xxiv.

Mar. xiii.

Luke xxi.

upon him, his Religion should by *their* means (a Company of poor illiterate Fishermen) be Preached with good success in all Parts of the World; He foretold likewise the utter Destruction of *Jerusalem* and the *Temple*, before that Generation passed away, and the Dispersion of the *Jews* into all Nations: And several other things, which it would take up too much time now to mention, he foretold should be, just in that manner in which they afterwards came to pass.

Concerning which it may be noted, that some of his Prophecies were fulfilled *soon after* they were spoken, the punctual Accomplishment whereof, was to those that both heard them spoken and saw them fulfilled, an evident Proof of his Prophetical Spirit, and a just Ground of expecting the Accomplishment of all his other Prophecies in their Season; and that others were not to be fulfilled 'till *a good while after*, the Accomplishment whereof at the time foretold, and long after the Predictions thereof had been recorded by the *Evangelists*, was a good Evidence to those that lived then, and is also to us that live now, and either read the Accomplishment thereof in History, or see the same with our own Eyes, that he was endued with a Divine Spirit; and likewise takes away all reasonable Ground of a Suspicion which we might otherwise have had, that in those Instances wherein both the Prophecy and the Accomplishment of it are related by the same Authors, the Prophecies were forged after the Events were come to pass.

Now



Now if this be true (and it is certainly true, if the *Gospel-History* be so) that our *Saviour* did foretell many things which afterwards happened, and those very casual and contingent things, depending upon the free will of Men, this was an evident token that he had a divine Spirit; for none can certainly foretell such things but GOD only, or those whom he enlightens with his Spirit; And therefore the Prophet *Isaiah* made this Challenge to the *Idols* of the *Heathens*, *Isa. xli. 23. Shew the things that shall be hereafter, that we may know that ye are Gods.*

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And if to this it should be objected that future Events have been sometimes foretold, by such as have not been true Prophets of GOD, nor enlightned by his Spirit, as by *Diviners, Astrologers* and *South-sayers*, and by the *Oracles* of the *Heathens*; this may be granted without any weakning of the Argument I am now upon for the Proof of our *Saviour's* divine Mission.

For there may be some future Events unforeseen by us, and yet depending so intirely upon the Course of Natural Causes, that unless hindred by a Miracle, they will as certainly come to pass as the Sun will rise to-morrow; And these, the *Devil*, who understands much better than we do the Power and Course of Nature, may foresee and consequently foretell; and when such a thing is foretold, we, who understand very little of Nature, may think it a Prophecy, whereas in truth there is no more of a Prophetical Spirit in the *Devil* when he foretells such things, than there is in a skilful *Astronomer*, when he Calculates

Serm. and foretells to a Minute for several Ages to  
VI. come, the Motions and Eclipses of the Sun,  
Moon, and Planets.

And even in future *Contingencies*, 'tis no wonder that the Events have sometimes verified the Predictions of the *Devil* and his *Prophets*; for this also may well enough be accounted for, without allowing that any Being hath a certain Fore-knowledge of future *Contingencies* but GOD only, if we do but suppose, as we may very reasonably do, that the *Devil* hath a perfecter Knowledge than we can have, of the Counsels, Intrigues and Interests of Men, that he understands their Tempers and Inclinations, that he hath lived a great while, and made very exact observations, that he hath had a long Experience of things, and hath also a notable sagacity much beyond what is in any Man; for so even a wise, observing, and experienc'd Man, may without a Spirit of Prophecy, see much further before him than Men commonly do, and may foretell, by a Guess that shall rarely fail, a great many things which a less thinking and experienc'd Man would never have thought of; And when the thing happens that was foretold, it may be past the Skill of others to judge, whether it was foretold by a Sagacious Guess, or by a certain Fore-knowledge of what would be.

And that the Predictions of *Diviners*, and the *Oracles* of the *Heathens* concerning future *Contingencies*, have been no more than only probable Conjectures (unless when they have been borrowed from divine Prophecies, as they may have often been) is evident by their un-  
certain

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certain Accomplishment; Some things indeed have happened as they have been foretold, but others have not so happened; and because the *Devil* could not always certainly tell what the Events of those things would be which he was Consulted with about, he commonly gave out his *Oracles* in *ambiguous Expressions*, that so, whatever happen'd he might be thought to have foretold it. And when the Predictions of any Person pretending to Prophecy, have fail'd in some Instances, tho' in others they have been accomplish'd, this is a certain Argument that he did not Prophesie by a divine Spirit; according to what is said, *Deut. xviii. 21, 22.* *If thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a Prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the Prophet hath spoken it presumptuously.* In which words it seems to be implied (tho' it be not expressly said) that if the thing foretold did come to pass, and especially that if of many things which the *Prophet* had foretold, and which could not be fore-known by the greatest Skill in Natural Cases, (such as are the Actions of a free Agent) not one thing fail'd, but his words were made good by the Event in every particular, they might then depend upon it that he was a *true Prophet*; except only in one Case mentioned in *Deut. xiii. viz.* When he made use of that Credit which the Accomplishment of his Predictions had gain'd him, to draw Men from the Worship of the true and only GOD, to the Worship of Idols. And accordingly 'tis observ'd in *1 Sam. iii.*



Serm. 19, 20. that because the Lord did let none of  
 VI. Samuel's words fall to the Ground, all Israel from

*Dan even to Beersheba knew that he was established to be a Prophet of the Lord.*

The before-named Exception having therefore no Place in our Saviour, for his Doctrine  
 Math. iv. 10. was, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy GOD, and him only shalt thou serve*; and there being not one of those many Predictions that he gave forth (tho' several of them were concerning the most casual Events that could be) which has not been in its due time fulfilled, we may safely conclude that he was a true Prophet of GOD, and consequently, that he ought to be hearkned to in every thing that he said.

5. Another Testimony that was given by GOD to the divine Mission of our Saviour, was by the Power of working Miracles, more and greater Miracles than ever had been done before since the beginning of the World, the Relation of which makes up a great Part of the Gospel-History.

And to these our Saviour himself frequently  
 Mat. xi. 4, 5. appeals, as to a most evident Proof that he  
 John x. 25, was sent by GOD, and that he was the Son  
 37, 38. xiv. of GOD; Joh. v. 36. *The Works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.*

And indeed what better Evidence can be desired that a Person speaking in the Name of GOD is sent by him, than to see him do the Works of GOD, that is, such Works as cannot be done but by the Power of GOD? And that our Saviour's Miracles were such,

cannot

cannot, I think, be doubted by those who believe they are truly related in the Gospel, which it is now supposed they are.

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And if to this it be said, that the first Opposers of Christianity both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, who either saw the Miracles of our *Saviour*, or had such good Assurance thereof from Eye-Witnesses, or Credible History, that they could not deny them, yet were not thereby convinc'd that he was a *Prophet* of GOD, but rather thought that he did all his mighty Works by *Magick Art*, and by the *Help* of the *Devil*;  
I Answer,

1. That 'tis a thing which we cannot be sure of, that the true Reason why any one of those who saw our *Saviour's* Miracles, or were persuaded of the Truth of them, did yet refuse to receive him as a Prophet sent from GOD, was because they were not convinc'd that his Miracles were done by a divine Power; for Men do not always act according to their Judgments; for we read of some of the *Chief Rulers* in *Joh. xii.* that they *believed on him*, that is, they were convinc'd in their Judgments, by the mighty Works that he did, that he was the Person he pretended to be, *but they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the Synagogue; for they loved the Praise of Men more than the Praise of GOD.* And therefore I think it most probable, that they who attributed those Miracles of his which they could not deny, to the working of the *Devil*, did not, nay could not, believe what they said, but only said it, because they were resolv'd never to receive a Doctrine (whatever Evidence was given of the Truth of it)

Serm. that was so contrary as our *Saviour's* was, to  
 VI. their Prejudices, Lusts, and Worldly Inter-  
 rests; and they could not tell what else  
 to say to justify themselves to the World.  
 But,

2. If their Blasphemy in ascribing our *Saviour's* Miracles to the power of the *Devil*, was not merely malicious, 'twas, however, most evidently groundless. For,

(1.) Tho<sup>d</sup> the *Devil* be without doubt of much greater Power than we are, and, understanding better than we do the Force of Natural Causes, can do many things which to the Eyes of Men may appear Miraculous, because it may be past their Skill to give an Account of them by Natural Causes; there is no reason however to believe that he can do a true Miracle; that is, that he can ever alter the Course of Nature, or produce any Effect but by the Means of Natural Causes, working in such a manner, and by such Laws and Rules as GOD hath appointed: And therefore the *Apostle* calls those strange Appearances which are done by the *working of Satan, Lying Wonders*.

2 Theſ. ii. 9:

But they were not *Lying Wonders* which were done by our *Saviour*; they did not only seem to be done, but were done, and they were Miracles not only in appearance but in truth, being many of them such Effects as were evidently above and beyond the Power of Nature, and therefore such as could not be done but by a Power Superiour to Nature, that is, by GOD's.

For



For who, but he only who at first brought all things out of nothing, could with five Loaves, and two small Fishes, satisfy the Hunger of more than five thousand Persons, leaving a Remainder of more than twice the number of Baskets-full of Fragments, that there had been of Loaves at the first? Or who could restore to Life a dead Carcass that began to putrefie, but he only who first form'd it out of the Dust of the Ground? Who could call back the departed Soul, and fix it to its former Residence, but he only into whose Hands it was returned, and who first breathed into our Bodies these Immortal Spirits?

And as to some other of his Works which may be thought to be such as might be produc'd by the working of Nature only, the manner in which they were done, plainly shews that they also were done by a Power Superior to Nature. For thus, a Sick Man may be restor'd to perfect Health, in time, and by degrees, by the use of proper Medicines, and such a Cure we reckon Natural; But those were plainly Super-natural Cures which were wrought, as our Saviour's for the most part were, without the use of any Medicines, only by a Word speaking, and many times at a great distance; and by which those who had been long Sick or Infirm, or Cripples, were restor'd to perfect Health and Strength in an instant of time. To suppose therefore that the Devil can thus at his Will alter the Course of Nature, is to attribute to him such a Power as is peculiar to the GOD of Nature, who only doth great Wonders. But,

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Matth. xiv.  
Mark vi.  
Luke ix.  
John vi.  
Luk. vii. 11;  
&c.  
John xi. 35;  
&c.

Pf. lxxii. 18;  
cxxxvi. 4.

(2.) If

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1 Joh. iii. 8.

Act. xiv. 15.

Tit. ii. 12.

(2.) If the Miracles of our *Saviour* had been only such as we might reasonably think did not exceed the *Devil's* Power to do, yet that they were not wrought by his Help, and consequently that they were done by the Power of *GOD*, is abundantly evident from the *Design* of them; which was to establish a Doctrine the most contrary that could be to the *Devil's* Interest. For to this Purpose the Son of *GOD* was manifested that he might destroy the works of the *Devil*; and he did it, by preaching to Men to turn from the vanities of Idols to the worship and service of the Living *GOD*, who made Heaven and Earth; and by teaching them to deny Ungodliness and Worldly Lusts, and to live Soberly, Righteously and Godly in this present World.

Now the *Devil* is certainly as subtle as he is powerful, and therefore if he has indeed any power to alter the course of Nature and to do a real Miracle, he would not, however, we may be sure, make use of this Power against himself, he would not thereby assist another to destroy his own Kingdom. And by this Argument our *Saviour* himself clearly confuted this Calumny, in *Mat. xii. 25*. When the *Pharisees* had said that he cast out Devils by *Beelzebub* the Prince of the Devils; he answered, Every Kingdom divided against it self is brought to Desolation—— and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his Kingdom stand? And

(3.) Lastly, As it is not credible that the *Devil* has such Power; or if he has, and was let alone to himself, that he would make use of this power to destroy his own Kingdom

Kingdom; so neither is it credible that *Al-* Serm.  
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*mighty* GOD, who has all power in his Hands,  
and can controul and limit the workings of  
the *Devil* and all created Beings as he pleases,  
would ever permit the *Devil* to out-do him-  
self in such wonderful Operations; so that  
more and greater Miracles should be done  
by an *Impostor*, than ever had been done be-  
fore by any *true Prophet*; which yet is mani-  
festly the Case, if indeed our *Saviour* was an  
*Impostor*.

He suffer'd indeed *Jannes* and *Jambres* to 2 Tim. iii. 8;  
*withstand* his Servants *Moses* and *Aaron* for  
some time, and to do, or seem to do, some  
wonderful Works like to theirs; for *Aaron*  
*cast his Rod upon the Ground and it became a* Exod. vii.  
10, 12.  
*Serpent*, and so did they: And *Aaron stretched* Ex. viii. 6, 7;  
*out his Hand over the Waters, and the Frogs*  
*came up and covered the Land; and the Magi-*  
*cians did so with their Inchantments, and brought*  
*up Frogs upon the Land of Egypt.* But tho' he  
suffered the *Magicians* thus to contend with  
his *Prophets*, the Victory was clearly on his  
Prophet's side; for *Aaron's Rod swallowed up* Ex. vii. 12;  
viii. 18.  
*their Rods*; and when the *Magicians* endea-  
vour'd by their Inchantments to bring forth  
*Lice*, as *Aaron* had done, they could not; but  
were forced to own before *Pharaoh* that it  
was the *Finger of GOD*; and from that time  
forward strove no more for Victory.

And thus it may be consistent with the Wis-  
dom and Goodness of GOD, at any time, in  
order to prove his People, and to know whether Deut. xiii. 1,  
&c.  
they love the Lord with all their Heart, to suf-  
fer the Sign or Wonder foretold by an *Inticer*  
to *Idolatry* to come to pass; and to distinguish Math. xxiv  
24.  
his



Serm. his *Elect* from Reprobates, to permit false  
 VI. *Christs and false Prophets, to shew great Signs  
 and Wonders*; and in just judgment upon such  
 as will not receive the love of the Truth that  
 they may be saved; to let them alone to be  
 deceived by that wicked one, whose Coming is  
 after the working of Satan, with all Power, and  
 Signs and Lying Wonders, and with all De-  
 ceivableness of Unrighteousness in them that  
 perish.

2 Thes. ii.  
 8, 9, 10.

But it cannot, I think, be reconciled to these  
 Attributes of GOD, that he should permit  
 greater Wonders, and more clear and un-  
 doubted Miracles to be done by a false Pro-  
 phet, than ever were done by any true Pro-  
 phet; because this would be too great a Trial  
 for Humane Nature; such Signs and Wonders  
 would be sufficient to deceive even those that  
 enquire after Truth with the greatest sincerity  
 of Heart. And I cannot conceive it consistent  
 with the Goodness of GOD, to permit that  
 such as are of honest Minds, and sincere Lo-  
 vers of Truth, should, after a fair Examina-  
 tion of the Proofs on both sides, have great-  
 er reason to Embrace Error than Truth;  
 which yet they plainly have in case the Mi-  
 racles done by false Prophets be more and  
 greater than have been done by any true Pro-  
 phet; unless the Falseness of the Doctrines  
 which they would thereby establish be more  
 evident than the Truth of their Miracles.  
 So that upon the whole, I think we may well  
 conclude this Head, with those Words of Ni-  
 codemus to our Saviour, Joh. iii. 2. *We know*  
*(we are assured of it, we have no Reason to*  
*doubt of it) that thou art a Teacher come from*  
 GOD,

GOD, for no Man can do these Miracles that thou doest, except GOD be with him. Serm. VI.

6. Another way by which GOD himself bare Witness to the Truth of our Saviour's Testimony, was by *Raising* him from the dead. To this great Miracle he himself often referred those that had any doubt of the Truth of his other Miracles, as what could not but be satisfactory to all that were capable of receiving Satisfaction. And this was the chief Subject of the *Apostle's* Sermons, the main Proof that they insisted upon to convince Men that *Jesus* was the *Christ*: And they seem to have no doubt upon them, that if they could but persuade Men of the Truth of his Resurrection, they would readily own that he was the *Christ*, and without further scruple receive every thing that he had taught them in the Name of GOD as a divine Truth. By this, say they, GOD has given Assurance unto all Men, that he has ordained him to be the Judge of the World: By this, say they, he was declared to be the Son of GOD with Power; because it was a thing evident to all, that no Power less than GOD's could raise the dead.

When therefore this was done, (and it was done if the *Gospel-History* be true) this was a plain Seal set by GOD himself to our Saviour's Testimony; a Seal not possible to be Counterfeited, and wherein the Divine Power is so clearly and deeply engraven, that whoever looks attently upon it, must be satisfied whose Seal it is. So that to grant the Resurrection of our Saviour, and yet to doubt whether he was the Person he gave out himself to be, is to doubt of the Truth of GOD himself

Joh. ii. 19.  
Mat. xii. 40.  
xvi. 4.

Act. ii. 24, 32.  
iii. 15. iv. 10.  
x. 40. xiii. 30.

Act. xvii. 30.

Rom. i. 4.

Serm. himself; for granting our *Saviour's* Resurre-  
 VI. ction, it can't be suppos'd that he was an  
 Impostor, without supposing that GOD him-  
 self did consent to the Imposture, and work  
 the most evident Miracle that ever was done,  
 on purpose to perswade Men to believe a  
 Lye.

I shall mention at present but one way  
 more whereby GOD was pleas'd to confirm  
 our *Saviour's* Testimony of himself; And that  
 was—

7. By the *Witness* of the *Holy Ghost*. Which  
 witness was given to him at his *Baptism*, when  
 Joh. i. 32, &c. the *Holy Ghost* descended in a visible manner as  
 a Dove and rested on him. It was also given  
 to him during the whole Course of his *Mini-*  
*stry*; for the *Holy Ghost* not only descended,  
 but abode upon him; and therefore St. Peter,  
 speaking of him, says that GOD anointed him  
 with the *Holy Ghost* and with Power.  
 Act. x. 38,  
 &c.

But that *Witness* of the *Holy Ghost* which I  
 now chiefly design, was that which was given  
 to him after his *Ascension* into Heaven, and  
 was an evident Token that all power in Hea-  
 ven and Earth was then committed to him;  
 I mean those *Gifts* of the *Holy Ghost* which he  
 shewred down on his *Apostles* on the Day of  
 Act. ii. 1, &c. *Pentecost*; when being met together, there came  
 suddenly a sound from Heaven as of a rushing  
 mighty Wind, which filled all the House where  
 they were sitting, and there appeared unto them  
 Cloven-Tongues like as of Fire, which sat upon  
 each of them; whereupon they were all filled  
 with the *Holy-Ghost*, and began to speak with o-  
 ther Tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

And



And this *Testimony* of the *Holy-Ghost* our *Saviour* promis'd before should be given to him; *Joh. xv. 26. When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.* And the *Testimony* indeed was very plain and full; for by this it clearly appear'd that all his former Miracles had been true, and had been wrought by a divine Power, when even after he had left this World, he was still able to make good this Promise to his Disciples, and to empower them to do greater Works in his Name, than he himself had done while he was living upon Earth; This was a clear Demonstration that he was the beloved Son of the Father, and was, as St. Peter says, exalted at GOD's right hand, when he did shed forth that wonderful power upon his *Apostles*, of which all that then dwelt in *Jerusalem*, or had come thither from all parts of the World to Worship, were Eye and Ear-Witnesses.

And this *Testimony* of the *Holy-Ghost* was given to our *Saviour*, not that at time only, not one Day and no more, but was continu'd to be given to him all the time of the Apostle's Preaching, (who were also enabled to communicate to others by laying on of Hands, the same miraculous Gifts of the *Holy-Ghost* which they themselves had receiv'd) until they had finish'd their Ministry, and planted *Christian Churches* in all the Countries of the then known World.

Thus I have briefly mention'd the great Evidence that the *Gospel-History* affords of the Truth of our *Saviour's Testimony* of himself; the

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ACT. II. 33.

ACT. II. 38.  
VIII. 17. X.  
44. XIX. 6.

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Serm. IV, v.

the *Matters of Fact* I have taken for granted, as being parts of the *Gospel-History*; the Truth of which has been, I hope, already sufficiently prov'd; and the Evidence it self is so clear and full, that I thought it needless to open it in more Words than I have done; for that the Testimony which GOD did by all these ways give to our *Saviour*, is a rational Inducement to believe the Truth of what he said concerning himself, is what I think, can't be doubted by those that allow themselves any time to consider things.

This I'm sure I may say, that if this strong Evidence that the *Gospel-History* affords of our *Saviour's* divine Mission be not sufficient to prove it, there never yet has been sufficient Evidence of the Truth of any divine Revelation; I had almost said, nor ever can be, but that I know it is not for us to say, what Infinite Power and Wisdom can do.

John vii 31.

But as some *Jews* in our *Saviour's* time said, *when Christ cometh, will he do more Miracles than these which this Man hath done?* So I may ask, and I believe it will be very difficult to make answer to it, *when Christ cometh* (if indeed *he* be not already come, if indeed that *Jesus* on whom we believe be not *he*) how shall we do to know him? What greater Assurance can he give us that he is the *Christ*, than *Jesus* hath given? What better Reason can we ever have to believe any Messenger that shall be sent from GOD, than we have to believe our *Saviour*?

For we have as much Reason, (supposing the *Gospel-History* to be true) to believe *him* to be sent from GOD, as we have to believe any

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any thing; we are as secure that we are not deceiv'd in *him*, as we are that we are not deceiv'd in the plainest Matters of sense. For the best, the only security that we have that our senses do not deceive us, and that every thing in the World is not quite otherwise than it appears to us to be, is the *Goodness* of GOD; and this same security we have that we are not deceiv'd in our *Saviour's* divine Mission. Nay we are more secure of this than we are of that; because it is more plainly inconsistent with the Goodness of GOD, to deceive us in a Matter on which our everlasting Welfare depends, than in Matters only of this Life, which are the chief things for which our bodily Senses are of use to us: And if indeed we are deceiv'd in our *Saviour*, it must be said that GOD *himself* has deceiv'd us, having given us all the Reason imaginable to believe *him* to be, as he said he was, the Son of GOD.

And now having been so large in shewing the *Evidence* that there is from the *Matters of Fact* recorded in the *History* of the *New Testament*, that our *Saviour himself* was a *Teacher sent from GOD*, I shall not need to spend much time in shewing that his *Apostles* were likewise *Commission'd* by GOD to instruct the World; and consequently that we ought also to receive all the *Doctrines* taught by *them* (whether in their *Epistles*, or in their *Discourses*, interwoven by St. *Luke* with his *History* of their *Acts*) as true and divine; for—

1. There is plainly no Reason why we should not receive them as such; because they



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are the very *same* that our *Saviour* taught, and *no other*. Some Points of *Christian Doctrine* are indeed more largely explain'd and handled by the *Apostles* in their *Epistles*, than they are in those Discourses of our *Saviour* that are recorded by the *Evangelists*; but between the *Doctrines* taught by our *Lord himself*, and those taught by the *Apostles*, there is such a perfect *Harmony* and *Agreement*, that if we had only their own Word for it, that they spake and wrote by the Inspiration of the Spirit, we might securely believe them; for tho' one Man may, without Inspiration, say the same thing which another before him has spoken by Inspiration; yet if the second says that he also is inspir'd, there can be no Hurt, tho' there may be a Mistake, in believing him; seeing whether the Man was Inspir'd or no, 'tis certain that the *Doctrine* was. But,

2. If there be any *Doctrines* taught by the *Apostles*, which we do not see were taught before by our *Saviour*, I say there is however from the *History of the Gospel*, Evidence enough of their divine Mission also; so that we may very securely take upon their Credit, as true and divine, any *Doctrine* which they have instructed us in. For,

(1.) That they were sent by our *Saviour*, is past all Dispute, if the *Gospel-History* be true; *Joh. xx. 21. As my Father hath sent me, so send I you*; and again, *Mat. xxviii. 19, 20. Go ye and disciple all Nations, Baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And that he had Authority to grant them such a Commission*

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tion, he shews in the words before; *All Power is given unto me in Heaven and in Earth; Go ye therefore and teach all Nations, &c.* And, Serm. VI.

(2.) That they were taught by GOD, and enlightened by his *Holy Spirit*, is what can't be doubted, if we believe the power of our *Saviour*, and the Truth of the Gospel; for before our Lord went from them, he breathed on them, and said, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost: And to what Purposes the Holy Ghost was to be given them, he had told them before: The Comforter which is the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my Name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your Remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you.* And, when he, the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you into all Truth; being therefore thus taught by the Spirit of Truth, our *Saviour* might well say as he does, *Luke x. 16. He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.* And, John xx. 22;  
Joh. xiv. 26;  
Joh. xvi. 13;

(3.) Lastly; We have all the reason in the World to receive them as *Messengers* from GOD, and to believe that all that they have taught is the Will of GOD, because they had the same Attestation of GOD to the truth of their Doctrine, that our *Saviour* himself had to his. I do not mean that GOD did bear them Witness all those ways by which he bare witness to our *Saviour*, for that could not be; but he bare witness to them all those ways by which it was proper for him to do it, and by which he had born witness to any former Prophets.

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Joh. xiii. 22.  
xx. 21.

For he bare witness to them that they were sent by him, by the *Testimony* of our Saviour, as he had done to our Saviour by the *Testimony* of John: And if the *Testimony* of a Prophet was credible concerning our Saviour, much more is the *Testimony* of the Son of God highly credible concerning a Messenger sent by him.

Joh. xvi. 13.

He bare witness to them also by enduing them with the *Gift* of Prophecy; for when the *Spirit of Truth* is come, says our Saviour, he will shew you things to come.

Mar. xvi. 20.

Act. iv. 33.

And Lastly, He bare witness to them, by that which is the most plain and sensible proof of a divine Mission, viz. By the *Power* of Miracles, and manifold *Gifts* of the Holy-Ghost. The Lord worked with them, and confirmed their word with Signs following, says St. Mark. And, with great Power, says St. Luke, gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And the greater part of the History of the Acts of the Apostles is spent in relating the wonderful Works that they did, by the Name of Jesus, and the Power of the Holy-Ghost, in confirmation of the Truth of their Doctrine.

But St. Paul (perhaps it will be said) of whose Writing are most of the Epistles, was not one of them, not called by our Saviour to be an Apostle as they were, nor so much as an Eye and Ear-witness of our Lord's Miracles and Doctrine; what Reason then have we to receive his Writings as Portions of Holy Scripture?

I Answer,



I Answer, as good, tho' not in every particular just the same that we have to receive the Writings of the other Apostles as such.

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For he was Converted and Ordain'd to be an Apostle, in a more wonderful manner than they were; as you may see in Acts ix.

And as our Lord himself gave witness to their Divine Mission, so he did also to his; Acts ix. 15. He is, says our Lord, a chosen Vessel unto me, to bear my Name before the Gentiles, and Kings, and the Children of Israel.

To him also as well as to them, the Spirit fore-shew'd things to come, several Proofs of which we may observe in the History of the Acts, and in his Epistles.

Act. xx. 22;

25.

xxvii. 10, 22;

2 Th. ii. 3, &c.

1 Tim. iv. 1,

&c.

2 Tim. iii. 1,

&c.

1 Cor. ii. 4.

2 Cor. xii. 12.

And Lastly; His Speech and his Preaching was, as theirs, in Demonstration of the Spirit, and of Power. In him all the Signs of an Apostle were seen, no less than in them, viz. Signs and Wonders, and mighty Deeds. And of him, with Barnabas in Company, it is that St. Luke speaks, when he says, that the Lord gave Testimony to the word of his Grace, and granted Signs and Wonders to be done by their Hands.

Acts xiv. 3.

And the latter part of the History of the Acts, from the xth. Chapter to the End, contains little else but an Account of St. Paul's Preaching, and of the Miracles that were done by the Power of GOD to confirm the Truth of his Doctrine; so that if we believe the Gospel-History, we can no more doubt of his divine Mission and Inspiration than we can of theirs; we must conclude, that if they were

Serm. *Apostles, so was he; that if they were Ministers*  
 VI. *of Christ, so was he too; forasmuch as in no-*  
 thing he was behind the very chiefest *Apostles;*  
 so that consequently we have as much Reason  
 to believe his Writings to be Inspired, as we  
 have theirs.

2 Cor. xi. 23.  
 xi. 5. xii 11.

And now by all that hath been said, I hope, I have fully made good the Point I was to prove; viz. That if the Matters of Fact recorded in the New Testament are true, they are sufficient Proofs of the Truth and divine Authority of all the Doctrines that are therein taught, whether by Christ himself, or by his Apostles. For if it be true that they were sent by GOD to instruct the World, and to declare the Will of GOD to Mankind; (and that they were, is sufficiently prov'd by their Credential Letters, which we have now perused and examin'd) we can no more doubt the truth of those things which they, as the Messengers and Ambassadors of GOD have deliver'd to us in his Name, than if we had heard GOD himself uttering the same by a Voice from Heaven. So that I cannot but perswade my self that the Proofs which have been offer'd in the foregoing Discourse of the Truth of all the Doctrines that are taught in the New Testament, are sufficient to convince any Rational and Considering Man of the Truth of any Doctrine, the Falsity whereof is not Notorious and Self-evident.

And therefore this, I think, is the only thing that can with any shew of Reason be pretended by any Person to justify his not receiving the Gospel as a divine Revelation,

viz.

viz. That the *Matter* of it, in some Particulars, is such as will not admit of any Proof at all; because no Arguments can make a thing credible, which in it self is *incredible*. And such, it may be pretended, some of the *Christian Doctrines* are which are taught in the *New Testament*; and especially the *Doctrine* of the *Trinity*.

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And that this Doctrine is clearly taught in the *New Testament*; we freely grant. But why should it be deem'd *incredible*? Does it imply a Contradiction? Can they that except against it, or against the *Gospel-Revelation* upon the Account of it, shew that it is impossible it should be true? Can they demonstrate that 'tis impossible for an Infinite and Eternal Being to beget a Son in his own Likeness, *the brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his Person*? Or can they shew it to be impossible that there should be a third Person proceeding from both these?

Heb. i. 3.

No, perhaps they'll say; But that these three should be one, as the *Scripture* teaches, that, they think, exceeds all the Measures of Belief; that, they can't but think a manifest Contradiction.

But why so? Do the *Christians* hold, or does the *Scripture* say, that they are three and one in the same respect? does it say that the one GOD is three Gods; or that those three whom it speaks of as three distinct Persons, ascribing personal Acts to each of them, are nevertheless but one single Person? No, it only tells us in general that these three are One? But how they are Three, or how they are One;



Serm. wherein consists their *Distinction* and wherein  
 VI. their *Unity*, it says not, at least not very plain-  
 ly. And I think it the safest Course in such  
 high Matters, in *Matters* so much too high for  
 us, not to exercise our selves, nor to pretend to  
 be Wise above what is written.

Psalm cxxxi. 1.

If therefore there be no Contradiction in  
 the *Doctrine* of a *Trinity* in *Unity*; (as there  
 is not unless we say that *GOD* is *One* and  
*Three* in the same *Respect*) that's enough; that's  
 all that needs to be said upon this Occasion.  
 For tho' we may (as indeed we must) allow  
 it to be an incomprehensible *Mystery*, there is no  
 Reason to Cavil at the *Gospel-Revelation*; or to  
 deny it to be a true divine *Revelation* upon  
 this Account.

For we live in a *World* of *Mysteries*; we  
 must believe *Mysteries* in abundance whether  
 we will or no; I mean, there are some Truths  
 so very plain even to our Reason that we  
 can't doubt of them, and yet so very high  
 and *Mysterious*, that we can no more fa-  
 thom them than we can the *Doctrine* of the  
*Trinity*.

For thus, that *Matter* is not *Eternal*, we  
 are as sure almost as we are of any thing,  
 for *Matter* could not exist of it self; and  
 yet how *Matter* should be made out of no-  
 thing, is as incomprehensible by us, as 'tis  
 how the *One* undivided *God-head* does per-  
 sonally subsist in the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy-*  
*Ghost*.

And, thus again, that *GOD* is *Eternal* we  
 are certain by Reason; (for by *GOD* we  
 mean the first Cause of all, and he who was  
 first

first could have none before him) and yet that any thing should exist without a *Cause* of its *Existence* is unaccountable; and if we were not sure that it must be so, we should be ready to say that it was impossible, and a manifest Contradiction that it should be so.

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Thus, I say, we are led by the Light of Reason only to a firm belief of some Truths, which yet we can give no Account of by our Reason. And I think, 'tis very hard that we will not receive an incomprehensible Doctrine, upon the Credit of a very plain and well attested Divine Revelation, as well as we do and must do the same upon the Evidence of Natural Reason.

Especially considering the *Subject* of this incomprehensible Doctrine, which is the *Essence* or *Substance* of GOD, who is an *Infinite Being* and so must needs be *incomprehensible* by our *finite Understandings*; by our Understandings, I say, which are so very shallow, that I believe I may truly say, we understand not the *Essence* or *Substance* of any thing. For we understand not what is the *Essence* or *Substance* of *Matter* or *Body*, tho' it be a thing that all our Senses are continually exercised about; all that we know of it, is some *Properties* or *Accidents* thereof; that it is something (but *what* we know not) that has *Figure* and *Dimensions*, that is hard, soft, fix'd, fluid or the like. And we understand no more, but rather less, what the *Essence* or *Substance* of our *Soul* is; all that we know of it, is, that 'tis something that *thinks*, and because it thinks

Serm. VI. thinks we know it must be *something*; and because none of those Properties which we observe in Matter have any Relation at all to *Thought*, we conclude that the *thinking Soul* is an *immaterial Something*; tho' what is *immaterial* cannot be explain'd by us, unless we could say what is *material*.

Seeing therefore (as the Wise Hebrew Wild. ix. 16. speaks) we do hardly guess aright at things that are upon Earth, and with Labour do find out the things that are before us; is it any wonder that we cannot search out, and fully know and comprehend the things that are in Heaven? If we are not able to understand even our own *Essence*, and how by an ineffable Union of Spirit with Matter, the whole together becomes *one Man*; is it any Wonder, that by all our Searching we cannot find out GOD, that we cannot find out the Almighty unto Perfection?

Job. xi. 7.

And what hath been thus briefly said, is, I hope, sufficient to shew that a Divine Revelation cannot reasonably be excepted against or refused; only upon the Account of some *Mysterious and Incomprehensible Doctrines* that are therein contain'd. And if not, then, I hope, what was said before is enough to satisfy any considering Man, that the Gospel is a true Divine Revelation.

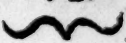
To Conclude all therefore; having Christ and his Apostles continually Preaching to us in the Books of the New Testament, Let us (as the Text says) hear them; Let us Reverence these Sacred Writings as the Oracles of GOD, Jam. i. 21, 22. and receive with Meekness the engrafted Word, which



which is able to save our Souls. But let us be Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only, deceiving our own selves. For (as the Apostle argues, Heb. ii. 3, &c.) If the word spoken by Angels was stedfast, and every Transgression and Disobedience receiv'd a just Recompence of Reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, GOD also bearing them witness both with Signs and Wonders, and with divers Miracles and Gifts of the Holy-Ghost, according to his own Will?

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VI

which is able to save our souls. But let us in  
heart of the Word, and not otherwise only. It  
cannot be our friend. For (as the Apostle  
saith, Heb. ii. 2, &c.) If the word spoken by  
angels was flesh, and every transgression and  
disobedience received a just recompence of re-  
ward: How shall we escape, if we neglect so great  
salvation, wherein the first began to be spoken  
by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by many  
that heard him, God also bearing them witness  
with signs and wonders, and with divers  
tokens and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according  
to his own will?

And how shall we escape, if we neglect so great  
salvation, wherein the first began to be spoken  
by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by many  
that heard him, God also bearing them witness  
with signs and wonders, and with divers  
tokens and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according  
to his own will?

Now

And how shall we escape, if we neglect so great  
salvation, wherein the first began to be spoken  
by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by many  
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tokens and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according  
to his own will?

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*New Revelations cannot reasonably be desired.*

THE

# Seventh SERMON,

Preach'd October 7<sup>th</sup> 1700.

S<sup>t</sup>. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

**W**HEN I first began to Discourse on these Words; I proposed to speak to these Three Points.

I. To shew that the present *Standing Revelation* of God's Will, contain'd in the *Books* of the *Old* and *New Testament*, is abundantly sufficient to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate.

*They*



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*They have Moses and the Prophets; (I add, they have also Christ and his Apostles;) let them hear them.*

II. To shew that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, it is an *unreasonable Request to desire more.* Nay, *Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.* And,

III. Lastly, To shew that in case God should condescend to gratifie Men in this unreasonable Desire, (working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the dead, to assure them of a future State, and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis highly probable that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance, by the Preaching and Standing Revelation of the Gospel, would be persuaded by this means. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets (nor Christ and his Apostles) neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

The first of these has been the Subject of several former Discourses; the second I design to speak to at this time; viz.

II. To shew that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, as I have shewn we have, in that *Standing Revelation of God's Will* which is contained in the *Holy Scripture*, it is an *unreasonable Request to desire more.* Nay, *Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

And

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And the *Unreasonableness* of the Request which the *Rich Man* here makes in the behalf of his Brethren; viz. That G O D would be pleased to send one from the dead to preach to them; or in general, how *unreasonable* it is is for Men now a-days to *desire*, or *look for* more means of Conversion, or Motives to Repentance, than G O D has been pleased to afford us in the Standing Revelation of the Gospel, will appear, if we consider these following things.

1. That the Principles of Faith and the Motives to Repentance which we have already, being well grounded upon *Matters of Fact*, which have been *once* already *sufficiently* proved and attested, 'tis altogether *needless* that any fresh or further Proof should be given of them; and 'tis what we never think reasonable to desire in other the like Cases.

That when G O D requires us to believe or do any thing, and sends a special Messenger to acquaint us with his Will, he should grant to this Messenger such *Testimonials*, as are sufficient to satisfy reasonable Men, that he is no Impostor, but a Teacher sent from G O D, is indeed a thing that may fairly be expected. And if G O D should not do thus, we should be excusable in not hearkning to such a Messenger, because we could not know whether he was a true or a false Prophet; and G O D does not require, neither indeed is it reasonable, that we should believe every Pretender to Revelation. And the clearest Proof of any Man's being sent from G O D to teach us any thing, being a Power of doing such Miracles and Mighty Works, as are manifestly above  
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the skill and strength of a Man to do, it was therefore highly requisite, and what might reasonably be looked for, that GOD should grant such a Power as this to all those whom he has ever inspired with new Light, and Commission'd to make any new Revelation of his Will to Mankind. And this he has always done.

He gave this Power to *Moses* in a large measure, because the Matters that Men were to trust him for, were many, and very considerable.

He gave it also to *some* of the succeeding *Prophets*, but in a less measure, because their Business, for the most part, was only to Interpret, or to press the Observation of the Law of *Moses*, which had been sufficiently prov'd before.

And he gave it in the largest measure of all to our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*; because the Revelation made by them was of *Truths* very *mysterious*, some of them above the Reach and Comprehension of Humane Reason; It was also a Revelation, in a manner wholly *new*, even to the *Jews* themselves, and much more to the *Gentiles*. And besides, it was also a Revelation in many Points, to appearance, *contrary* to a former Divine Revelation; inasmuch as it ordered the Abolition of many things which had been before enjoyned by divine Authority; viz. all the Ritual and Ceremonial Law of *Moses*. And therefore to gain Credit to their Testimony, that they were inspired and sent by GOD to teach such things, it was very requisite that they should produce more, and more plain and undeniable *Testimonials* of



of their Divine Mission, than *Moses* himself had done. And such Testimonials they had, such they did produce, working more Miracles, and those as I may say, more wonderful and Miraculous, than *Moses* and all the *Prophets* together had wrought before.

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But when these Testimonials had been *once* fairly produced, and examined, and by all reasonable Men allowed to be true and sufficient; and when *Christ* and his *Apostles* had made and published all that Revelation which they were Commissioned to make; And when to prevent all misunderstandings of it, or mistakes concerning it, they had committed it all to Writing; and the Men that lived in those times, and were capable of enquiring into the Truth of it, were well assured that the Books said to be written by the *Apostles* and *Evangelists*, were indeed theirs, and contained in substance all the same things; and no other, which they had before declared by word of Mouth, and confirmed by Miracles: After this, I say, when the Divinity of the Revelation was thus *once*, at the first Publishing of it, so fully confirmed, there was no need that it should be proved any more, and all other Proof thereof would have been *superfluous*; because the whole Matter, both Doctrine and Proof, being *once* faithfully recorded, and those Records well attested, there could afterwards be no reasonable Cause to call it again in Question. So that the Reason of working Miracles being then ceas'd, it was reasonable that the Power of working Miracles should cease too; at least till such time as God should think fit, to make some Alteration in, or Addition to his former Revelations; (which we have good Reason to think he will never do) or till he should please to undertake the

Serm. Conversion of those Nations to the Christian  
 VII. Faith, to whom the Knowledge of the former  
 Miracles that had been wrought for its Confirmation could not be so well communicated by Credible History as it is to us.

For (as was hinted before) *Credible History* is all the Proof and Evidence that we ever think *reasonable* to require in *other* Cases of the like Nature.

As for instance ; When a new Law is made concerning any Matter : it is requisite, according to the Custom of our Country, that it should pass both *Houses of Parliament*, and that the *King* should ratifie and confirm it ; and that afterwards it should be some way so published and promulged, that all the Subjects that are then alive should have sufficient Assurance given them that such a Law is made. But after this Law has been once so passed, and ratified and promulged, it is passed and ratified and promulged for ever ; and no Man is so unreasonable as to expect that every *Parliament* that is called afterwards, should read and pass over again all the Laws that have been made before their Time ; or that every *King* that succeeds to the Throne should afresh ratifie and publish all the Laws that were made by all his *Predecessors*. But all the Proof that we ever require of the Authority of any ancient Law, is a true Copy of it, and a good History or Record of its being made at such a time, by such a King, confirmed by the Tradition of all the intermediate Ages to our Time, which have allowed of its Authority, by citing it as a Law of the Land, by Pleading from it, and by giving Judgment according to it.

And

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And he who will not allow of the same Proof and Evidence of the Authority of the *Christian Institution* so many hundred years ago established, but would needs have new Miracles and new Revelations to confirm the former, is every whit as unreasonable as that *Criminal* would be, who being Indicted upon some *Ancient Statute*, should refuse to plead to his Indictment, upon Pretence that he knew not whether there was any such Law or not; it being made (if ever it was made) long before his Time, and there being none now alive that were present at the making of it. Shew him the Law in the *Statute-Book*; why, how does he know, he'd say, but that the Printers had a mind to put a Cheat upon the Nation, by Printing a Law of their own making, as a Law made by some of our ancient Kings; nay shew him the *Original Record*, still he'd say, There have been abundance of Forgeries in the World, and how does he know but that this is one? The Record, he'd own perhaps, looks like an Ancient Deed, and has all the Marks of such Antiquity as it pretends to; but, after all, 'tis possible it may be, and therefore he cannot be sure it is not, a Forgery; and 'till he is assured of this, he will not plead to an Indictment that is grounded upon it. But if the *King* and *Parliament* that now are, will be pleased to declare that this is a good Law, and if he himself may be allowed to be by when they shall declare it; or if at least two or three Witnesses that he can trust shall testify upon Oath, that they were present when it was passed into a Law, then he will allow it to be a good Law; and after that, will be content to suffer the Pu-

nishment



Serm. nishment of it, if he shall ever again be a Trans-  
VII. gressor.

Now what Man is there that would think this a reasonable Demand? Or what *Judge* or *Court* would ever allow of such a Plea? And yet, as unreasonable as it is, it is just the same with theirs, who, pretending to be more wise and cautious than their Neighbours, will not allow of the same sort of Proof (tho' indeed much better in its kind) of the Truth of the *Christian Religion*; but tho' we have as *Authentic Histories* as any are in the World, (such Histories as the greatest Adversaries of *Christianity* have not been able to say any thing to invalidate the Truth of) which declare that *Christ* and his *Apostles* taught such and such Doctrines, and wrought such and such Miracles to confirm the Truth of their Doctrine, yet will not believe that the Doctrine of *Christianity* is true and Divine, unless they may have special Messengers sent to them to declare afresh all the same things which the *Apostles* once did; and those endued with a Power of working in their sight and presence the same Miracles over again, that are said to have been formerly done by *Christ* and his *Apostles*, to confirm the Testimony that they gave.

2. The *Unreasonableness* of that Request which the *Rich Man* here makes in the behalf of his Brethren, viz. That *God* would make a new Revelation for their particular Conversion; or in general, The *Unreasonableness* of our now desiring fresh Revelations; new Miracles or Apparitions of Men from the dead, to confirm the Truth of those things which are already sufficiently proved to us by the *Standing Revelation*

velation of the Gospel, will further appear, if we consider; That to *us* who live now in *Christian Countries*, other Grounds of Faith or stronger Motives to Repentance than we have already in the standing Revelation of the Gospel might be *inconsistent* with the *Excellency* of Faith, might *destroy* the *Virtue* of *Believing*, and might be too great a *Force* and *Constraint* upon us, such as would in a manner take away our *Liberty* of *Choice*.

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For there is no *Virtue* at all in *Believing* what we see; there is no *Praise* or *Thanks* at all due for doing what we are driven or forced to do; and for *us*, who have *already* abundantly sufficient Grounds to believe and embrace *Christianity*, to have fresh *Miracles* wrought every day before our own eyes (such *Miracles* as we could not possibly doubt the *Truth* of) to confirm those *Doctrines* which are already sufficiently confirmed, would not be to persuade us, but to *force* us to be *Christians*; so that then the State we are now in would not be, as *GOD* designed it should be, a State of *Trial*; for the *Trial* of *Wisdom* is, when there are some *Reasons* on both sides; and he is the *Wise Man* who in that Case gives Judgment on that side on which the *Reasons* are strongest.

But against what I have now said perhaps it may be objected, That the Evidence which we desire of the *Truth* of Religion is *no more* than we are told has been *already* given to some Men; particularly to those who lived in our *Saviour's* and his *Apostles* times, and we cannot see why it would be *more* inconsistent with the Nature of Faith and Religion *now* than it was

Serm. *then, or how it would more destroy our Freedom*  
 VII. *than it did theirs, or how it would be a greater*  
 Force upon our Choice than it was upon theirs, to  
 have the very same Evidence of the Truth of  
 the *Christian Religion* which they had.

But in answer to this, it may be consider'd;  
 That as *they* then had some Evidence of the  
 Truth of the *Christian Religion* which *we* have  
 not, so *we* now have some Evidence thereof  
 which *they* had not. *They* indeed saw with their  
 own Eyes some of the Miracles that were  
 wrought for the Confirmation of *Christianity*;  
 but *they* had not, as *we* now have, a credible  
 History or Record of a very great number of  
 Miracles that were wrought for that purpose.  
 And therefore ( without considering at present  
 which of these Evidences of the Truth of the  
 Facts upon which our Religion is grounded,  
 is the most convincing ) thus much is plain;  
 That if *we*, who have already very good Reason  
 to believe them upon the Credit of a well  
 attested History, were also admitted to be Eye-  
 Witnesses of some fresh Miracles, such as *we*  
 are told were then wrought, both these Evidences  
 together would be stronger and more irresistible,  
 than either of them alone; So that consequently,  
 if *we* who have already one of these Evidences,  
 were allowed to have the other also, *we* should  
 have more Evidence in the whole than *they* had,  
 our Choice consequently would not be so free  
 as theirs was, it would not be so much in the  
 Power of our Wills to be *Infidels*, as it was  
 in theirs.

True, perhaps you'll say, *we* should indeed  
 in that Case have more Evidence than they  
 had, but that is not the thing *we* desire; all  
 that



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that we could wish for, is the very *same* Evidence that they had; and upon this Condition we could be well contented to want that Historical Evidence which we have and they had not; for we can't but think, that the Evidence that *they* had is much stronger than *ours*, and that *they* had much greater Reason to be *Christians* than we have. For 1. The *Apostles* of *Christ* who (as 'tis said) both *saw* his Miracles, and were *enabled* by the Power of the *Holy Ghost* to do the like themselves, had plainly *greater* Reason to believe, than even *those* had who heard from their Mouths the Testimony that they gave concerning our *Lord*, and saw the Miracles that were done by their Hands in Confirmation of their Testimony. And 2. *They* who *saw* with their *own Eyes* the *Miracles* that the *Apostles* wrought had more Reason to believe, than *those* had to whom they were only *Reported* by Eye-Witnesses, and therefore much rather than we have who receive this Report only by a *History* that was written many hundred years ago. Now this is all that we desire, *viz.* To be upon the *same Level* with those who lived in the Primitive Times, and to have *as much* Reason to be *Christians* as they had; and we can't see why this Request should be thought *unreasonable*; we do not understand why there would not be then as much Freedom, and consequently as great Virtue in *our* Believing upon such strong Evidence as there was in *theirs*.

In Answer to this therefore I shall consider distinctly the two Cases before-mentioned, and compare the same with ours.

Serm. (1.) I shall consider the Case of the *Apostles*,  
 V.II. who both *saw* our Lord's Miracles, and were  
 enabled by the Power of the *Holy Ghost* to do  
 the like themselves.

And that *they* had a *surer* Ground of Faith  
 than any since, or than any besides themselves  
 ever had, I believe must be granted. But then  
 'tis to be considered on the other side;

1. That the *Apostles* were but *few* in number,  
 only *twelve* Persons; or if we should reckon  
 into the number, as in this respect equal to  
 the *Apostles*, all those that were called by our  
*Saviour himself* to be his *Disciples*, and who  
 were very much tho' not so constantly in his  
 Company as the *Apostles* were, we read but of  
*seventy* of them; or if we add to these all those  
 Luke x. 1. that were *convinced* by our *Saviour's* Miracles  
 that he was the *Christ*, and that owned them-  
 selves his *Disciples* while he was upon Earth, 'tis  
 probable that all these together were no more  
 than *five hundred*; viz. those *five hundred bre-*  
 Cor. xv. 6. *thren*, to whom, when met together in *Galilee*,  
 our Lord shewed himself alive after his Pas-  
 sion.

2. It may be also considered; that *their*  
*Case* was *extraordinary* and *peculiar*, and that  
 this Advantage of greater Evidence (as we  
 reckon it) which they had above all others  
 was no more than was *necessary* to qualifie  
 them for that *special Office* which they, and  
 none but they, were to be employ'd in; which  
 was to *bear Witness* to the Men of that Ge-  
 neration by word of mouth, and to all future  
 Ages by their written Testimony, of the Do-  
 ctrines and Miracles of our *Saviour*; for no  
 Man is a proper Witness of any Matter of  
 Fact

Fact, but only he who was an *Eye-Witness* thereof.

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3. It may be further considered, that as *they* had a more clear and unexceptionable Evidence of the Truth of *Christianity*, than any besides ever had, so *they* had also a greater Burden laid upon them, than any *Christians* since have had; and it might be no more than necessary that the Grounds of their Faith should be as much surer and stronger than those on which other Men's Faith is built, as their Duty was larger and more difficult than other Men's Duty is. For a weaker Foundation is as well able to support a low Building, placed in a Bottom, and well sheltered from Storms, as a much stronger is to bear a high built Tower, situated on the top of an Hill, or by the Seashore, and continually expos'd to violent Winds and Tempests.

And this was the Condition of the *Apostles* in Comparison with ours. We have indeed several Temptations to resist by the Power of our most holy Faith, but then they are only such Temptations as are common to Men, and for the overcoming whereof a Faith grounded only upon good *Historical Evidence* is sufficient; for by the Power of such a Faith a great many in all Ages have happily overcome them. But the *Apostles* had Difficulties and Temptations of another sort to contend with; they wrestled not only against *Flesh and Blood*, but against *Principalities*, against *Powers*, against the *Rulers of the Darknes of this World*, against *Spiritual Wickedness in high Places*. It was their Business to go in an untrodden Path, to break the Ice, and to make plain the way for all that were



Serm. VII. were to follow; and *our* Work (very easie in comparison with *theirs*) is only to follow in that Way which they have made plain and smooth, to that Kingdom of Heaven into which they could not enter but thro' manifold Tribulations.

That the *Apostles* therefore had stronger and more convincing Proofs of the Truth of the *Christian Religion* than we have, and such as *they* could not so easily resist, as *we* may those which are afforded to us, may be granted; and yet it may be unreasonable for us to desire the same, unless we were to be put to the same Trials of our Faith that they were; which in a *Christian Country* can hardly be.

And indeed, as desirous as we seem to be of having such Evidence of the Truth of our Religion as we are told the *Apostles* had, I believe there are very few of us but had rather be contented with less Evidence, than have so much as the *Apostles* had with its appendant Burden; which was to travel all the World over, even into the most rude and barbarous Countries to plant *Christianity*; expecting wherever they came Bonds and Afflictions, meeting every where with the most violent opposition and roughest Usage; encountering every where the greatest Dangers, and sure at last to be made a bloody Sacrifice to the Malice and Fury of their Persecutors. How much St. Paul alone endured (and 'tis like the Sufferings of the other *Apostles* were not much less) you may see in 2. Cor. xi. 23, &c. and yet he was not then come to the end of his Sufferings; In Labours abundant, in Stripes above measure, in Prisons frequent, in Deaths oft; Of the Jews  
five

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five times received I forty Stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with Rods, once was I Stoned, thrice I suffered Shipwrack, a Night and a Day I have been in the Deep; in Journeyings often, in Perils of Waters, in Perils of Robbers, in Perils by mine own Country-men, in Perils by the Heathen, in Perils in the City, in Perils in the Wilderness, in Perils in the Sea, in Perils among false Brethren; In Weariness and Painfulness, in Watchings often, in Hunger and Thirst, in Fastings often, in Cold and Nakedness; Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the Care of all the Churches. And therefore he might well say, as he does, 1 Cor. iv. 9, &c. I think that GOD hath set forth us the Apostles last, as it were appointed to Death; for we are made a Spectacle to the World, and to Angels, and to Men; we are Fools for Christ's sake—we are weak—we are despised; even unto this very hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling Place; and labour working with our Hands, being reviled—persecuted—defamed; we are made as the Filth of the World, and are the Off-scowring of all things unto this Day. It was therefore plainly necessary that a Faith which was to undergo these severe Trials, should be built upon the surest Grounds; but for us, and to enable us to overcome the World, a Faith that is founded upon less certain Evidence may be as sufficient.

(2.) The Second Case before-mentioned was of those who heard with their own Ears the Testimony which the Apostles gave concerning our Lord; and saw with their own Eyes the wonderful Works that they did in Confirmation of

Serm. of their Testimony. We could wish at least  
 VII. that we had such strong Evidence of the Truth  
 of the *Christian Religion* as they had; and if  
 we had, we see not why there would not be  
 as much Choice, and consequently as much  
 Virtue in *our* believing as there was in *theirs*.

But here it may be considered,

1. That it was the Lot but of very few, even  
 of those that lived in the *Apostles* times, except  
 of the *Jews* that dwelt in *Judea*, to hear the  
*Apostles* themselves, or to see with their own  
*Eyes* the *Miracles* that they wrought; and even  
 of these there were but few that had the op-  
 portunity of seeing many of their mighty Works.  
 So that all things considered, the Evidence that  
 we have of the Truth of our Religion, if it be  
 not fully equal to, is very little inferior to that  
 which they had; for it being (as has been for-  
 merly shewn) morally impossible that the Gos-  
 pel History which is now in our Hands should  
 be forged or spurious, or corrupted and al-  
 tered, what can be thought to be wanting in  
 the Clearness of the Evidence that we have  
 (being given in Writing and not by Word of  
 Mouth) is made up by the Fulness and Abun-  
 dance of it; we having in the *Writings* of the  
*Apostles* and *Evangelists*, several *Witnesses* testi-  
 fying the same *Miracles*, and every one of them  
 Witnessing more *Miracles*, than any except those  
 who were constant *Attendants* upon our Lord,  
 or *Companions* of the *Apostles* were in a Capa-  
 city to witness. But,

2. Granting it to be true, that in the *Apo-  
 stle's* times those to whom the Gospel was  
 preached, had generally clearer and stronger  
 Evidence of the Truth of *Christianity* than we  
 have



have now; yet I say, even that Evidence of Sense which they had was not more apt or likely to convince and persuade them, than the Proof which we now have, tho' in it self it be less, is to convince and persuade us.

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For when Men have already taken up an Opinion (no matter upon what Grounds) or when by their Worldly Interest they are engaged to be of such an Opinion, it can't be expected that the same Reasons, I mean Reasons of the same strength in themselves, should be sufficient to persuade them to alter their Opinion, which would have sufficed to have fix'd and establish'd them in their former Notions.

And this is plainly the Difference between those Times and ours. For when the Revelation of the Gospel was first made by *Christ* and his *Apostles*, all, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were most strongly prejudiced against it; each of them having been bred up in a Persuasion that their own way of Worship was right, and the *Jews* in particular having had good Assurance that their Law given by *Moses* (to which the Doctrine of *Christianity* seem'd very opposite) had been of Divine Institution. But however, when a Man has been bred up in the Belief of any thing, and has believ'd it a good while, he takes it for granted that he had reason to believe it, whether he had so or not; so that the Prejudice against *Christianity* was as powerful, tho' not altogether so just, in the *Gentiles*, whose Religion was meerly fabulous, as in the *Jews*, whose Law was indeed of Divine Institution.

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And besides, (which was an Impediment alike common both to the *Jews* and *Gentiles*) they could not either of them then embrace and profess the *Christian Religion* without apparently hazarding the Loss of all things that were dear to them in this World; and how very apt a strong Worldly Interest is to blind Mens Eyes and to byass their Judgments, is what we cannot but daily observe in all other Cases.

But *our Case* now is quite otherwise; *our Prejudices* and *our Interest* are both for *Christianity*; for we suck'd it in with our Mothers Milk, and we found it in the *establish'd Religion* of the Country where we were Born; for which Reasons we believed it, or at least were strongly inclined to believe it, before we knew or had heard of any other Reasons; so that to *us*, who are already inclined on this side; to *us*, who to be sure, are not prejudiced against it; to *us*, whose Interest leads us to continue in the Religion we were first bred in, such Proof as we always accept and allow of in other Cases of the like Nature, is Proof strong enough. And therefore much rather when we have, as indeed we have, a stronger and more uncontrouled Tradition for the Truth of the *Gospel History*, than of any History in the World besides, we shall be inconsistent with our selves, if we do not allow it to be sufficient.

So that upon the whole Matter, considering the *Prejudices* both from *Education* and *Interest* which they lay under who lived in those Times when the Gospel was first reveal'd and preach'd; even *their own Eye-sight* of some of those

those Miracles that were then wrought to confirm it, was not *more persuasive* than is that *good Assurance* that we now have by credible and undoubted *Records* that such Miracles were then wrought. The Proof they had, consider'd in it self, was indeed stronger than ours; but considering our different Circumstances, that Proof was not more apt or likely to convince them, than that which we have given us is to convince and persuade us. And if we had now the very same Proof and Demonstration of the Miracles wrought for the Confirmation of our *Christian Religion*, viz. The Evidence of our own Senses; this, which was but sufficient to them, might to us be such a Proof as would be, in a manner, a *Force* upon us; such clear Demonstration meeting with no strong Prejudice or considerable Interest on the other side, might be enough to over-power us, so that we could not be *Infidels* if we would, and then there would be no Virtue in Believing.

3. The *Unreasonableness* of desiring more Proof of the Truth of Religion than GOD has been pleased to afford us by the *Standing Revelation* of the Gospel, and particularly of desiring that GOD would be pleas'd to work new Miracles for our particular satisfaction, or for the Conviction of some of our Friends that are not persuaded by the Gospel-Revelation, will further appear, if we consider the *equal Right* that *all other Men* have to desire the same, and the many *Inconveniencies* and *Absurdities* that would follow, in case *all Men* should be gratified in this Desire.

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For as to the *first* of these, viz. The equal Right that all other Men have to desire the the same; What Reason can I pretend for my Infidelity, which another Man may not also as well plead for his? Have not I as good Proof of the Truth of Religion as my Neighbour has? Have not I as free Recourse to the Holy Scriptures as he? and the same Evidence of the Truth and Divine Inspiration of them that he has? And are we not also in all other Respects alike? Being Born in the same Country, and having had the same Education, and consequently being probable to have the same Inclinations towards, or the same Prejudices against, or Aversion to the Christian Faith? And if so, what Reason can I plead for any extraordinary or peculiar Favour? For is not he GOD's Creature as well as I? And hath not GOD the same Tenderneſs and Regard for him that he hath for me, and consequently the same Desire of his Welfare, that I can suppose he hath of mine? Why then should not GOD grant him this same Request whether in the Behalf of himself or his Friend, as well as I can expect he should grant it me? In a word, Why may not every Man desire the same as well as I? And why should not GOD grant it to all that desire it, as well as to any one?

But now if GOD should do this, see what Inconveniencies and Absurdities would follow thereupon?

One sort of Men would not believe, unless they might see Apparitions; If one went unto them from the dead, they would repent. And so for their sakes the World must be filled with Ghosts, the Dead must never be at Rest in their Graves,

Graves, and the Souls in Bliss who once rejoiced in the thought of being for ever got clear out of a troublesome World, must be content (to gratifie these Men) to leave their place in *Abraham's Bosom*, and to be deprived of the Beatifical Vision, and the unspeakable Joys of Heaven, as long and as often as any of these unreasonable Men are pleased to desire it.

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But another sort of Men it may be there are, that would not like this kind of Proof; A *transient* Apparition of a Ghost they'd look upon perhaps as a thing too liable to Cheat and Imposture; they'd therefore desire some more *plain* and *sensible* and *permanent* Miracles than this; some such Miracles as those were which our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* wrought; and if they could but see *such*, they make no doubt but they should be convinced. And so for their sakes, and for their Conviction, half the Men that are born into the World, must be born Lame or Blind, that so they may be afterwards Cured by Miracle, for the satisfaction of these Men: And a great many must be possess'd with Devils, and be grievously torn and tortur'd by them, that these Men may have the pleasure of seeing with their own Eyes the Evil Spirits cast forth; and of observing how much more calm and sober the Men are after the Devil is gone out, than they were before.

But even these Miracles, 'tis like, would not satisfy all; but some it may be, would be apt to suspect that there might be some Trick or Collusion in them, and that what they saw, was done only by a *Confederacy* between the *Physician* and the *Patient*, to amuse and deceive the Beholders; and therefore, what they, it may be,

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would

Serm. VII. would desire for their particular satisfaction, would be, to see a dead Man raised to Life again after he had been dead several Days, and began to stink; and such a Miracle as this they are sure would convince them. And so for their sakes a great many Men must die two or three times over, or much oftner; because perhaps every time before they have been dead a Week, some other Person that was not present before, may have a desire to see with his own Eyes the same Experiment tried over again.

But even this Miracle also would perhaps be excepted against by some, and nothing less would satisfy them than the very *same* Evidence which the *Apostles* themselves had, who conversed with our *Saviour* for some years together, and heard all his wise *Discourses*, and saw all his *Miracles* and mighty Works, and were present with him when he expired on the Cross, and assisted at the laying his dead Body in the Sepulchre, and within three Days after saw him alive again, touched and handled him, eat and drank with him; and after they had thus, several times, by the space of forty Days, been, by many *Infallible Proofs*, assured of the Reality of his Resurrection, saw him visibly taken up in his Body into Heaven.

They that had this, they grant, had very good Proof and Evidence of the Truth of the *Christian Religion*; and had they but been of this happy Number, they are sure they should not only have believed, but also willingly have suffered as much as the *Apostles* themselves did for Bearing their Testimony to the Truth of those things which they had seen and heard.

And



And what now must be done for the Satisfaction of these Men? For *these* have as much Right to a full Satisfaction as any others; and by the same Reason that others do expect to be gratified in what they desire, *these* may do so too.

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And therefore in order to their Satisfaction, it is necessary that our Saviour should be Born into the World in every Age of it, or indeed much oftner; and that in every Country at least, if not in every Town and Village he should live and Preach and do Miracles, and be Crucified and Rise again; for that these things have been once done, they can't, they say, believe only upon the Testimony of other Men who say they did see them; And therefore by the same Reason, if they themselves should see them, other Men that should come after, or live in other Countries, would have as little Cause to believe their Testimony.

So that for the full satisfaction of all such Doubting Men as these our Saviour must have suffered often since the Beginning of the World, and must continue to do so very frequently as long as the World shall last, because with some Men nothing but seeing is believing.

But that this should be, is what I presume none besides themselves can think it reasonable either for Men to ask, or for God to grant.

4. Lastly, The Unreasonableness of desiring any further or additional Proof of the Truth of Religion, besides what is already afforded us in the Standing Revelation of the Holy Scripture, will farther appear by considering our own Interest in being convinced and persuaded of the Truth of Religion by such Arguments and

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Motives as are in themselves *sufficient* for that purpose, altho' they be not so very strong and forcible as we could wish they were.

And this Argument I shall handle in the way of *Reproof*, (and a just and seasonable *Reproof* I think it) to such bold and presuming Persons as I have been now speaking of, who will needs stand upon their Terms with Almighty God, and will not be persuaded to Believe and Repent, but just by such Reasons and such Motives as they themselves shall be pleased to require. Tell not us, say they, of *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and of things that were done a great while ago, we know not when; We'll have fresh Revelations, and new Miracles, or Messengers from the Dead, or else we will not Believe and Repent; that we are resolv'd on.

Very well; Then I say you may, if you will, continue still in your Unbelief and Impenitence. Nevertheless I would advise you, before you fully determine to persist in this Resolution, to take a little time to consider seriously, *whose Interest and Concern* it is, either that you should Believe, or that you should not Believe; consider *who* it is that will be a *Gainer* or a *Sufferer*, either by the *One*, or by the *Other*. For let me tell you, if there be really a Heaven and a Hell, and a Judgment and a Life to come, 'tis not your not believing them that will make them not to be; and if these things are true, 'tis your *own Life and Soul* that are at Stake; and if you are resolv'd to lose both unless you may be Saved *your own way*, you your selves will be the greatest, and you your selves will be the only Sufferers.

And this is a Consideration that affects the Case very much, and makes it very *unreasonable* to insist upon having such satisfaction in this Case, as in some other Cases might, not so very unreasonably, be desired. Serm. VII.

For if any Man tells me a Story which it is for *his Interest* I should believe, it is *his Concern* to give me such Assurance of it as I shall require, even altho' less than I require would be in all Reason sufficient; And therefore if I will not believe one or two Witnesses, tho' it may be unreasonable in me not to believe them, yet it is *his Business*, and what it *behoves him* to do, to produce, if it be possible, ten or twenty Witnesses, or as many more as I shall ask for; And if one sort of Proof, tho' in it self it be never so good, will not satisfy me, it is *his part*, and what *he* ought in Reason to do, if he be able, to bring other Proofs of it; and so to go on multiplying his Witnesses and his Proofs, 'till such time as I shall declare my self fully satisfied; And the Reason is, because the Loss or Inconvenience will be *his*, and *only his*, in Case he cannot convince me of the Truth of his Relation.

But now on the other side, if the Story which he tells me be true. and it be for *my Interest* and *Advantage* only, not at all for *his* that I should believe it to be true; if, I say, *he* will be neither a *Gainer* nor a *Loser*, whether I believe his Report, or whether I do not believe it; then, if he gives me such Evidence of the Truth of it, as is *sufficient* to convince a *Man* of *Reason*, he has done *enough*; he has done all that belonged to him as a Friend to do. And if after this, I make it my Business to *cavil* at



Serm.  
VII.

and to *except* against his Evidence, and go about to *prescribe* to him what sort of Proof he should give me of the Truth of what he relates; declaring withal that less or other Proof than just that which I require shall never satisfy me; he may justly reject my Suit as unreasonable, and condemn me for a Fool, that will not see *my own Interest*, nor know when a Friend has done enough.

And this is exactly our Case.

GOD has sent his *Son* to us with the Promise of Eternal Life, and has given us *sufficient Assurance* of his Divine Mission, and thereby of the Truth of that Revelation which he made. Now if we will believe this, well, and good, the *Profit* will be all *our own*; we shall save our *own* Souls alive; But GOD will receive no Advantage to himself by our Believing; his perfect Happiness being not capable of any Increase. But if we will not Believe this Testimony that GOD has given of his *Son*, if we *except* against his Witnesses, and cavil at his Evidence, and will not Believe but just upon that very sort of Proof which we our selves are pleas'd to pitch upon; why then, we may e'en take our own Course, we may be Unbelievers still; but 'tis *we* only that shall suffer by our Unbelief; the Infinite and Essential Happiness of GOD, being as little capable of Diminution, as of Advancement. And, as if we Believe and Repent, GOD will be glorified in our Salvation, so, if we will not Believe and Repent, he will be no less glorified in our Destruction.

Seeing therefore whether you Believe or whether you do not Believe, GOD will be neither

a Gainer nor a Loser; but the *Profit* or the *Damage* will be *all your own*; it is plainly your *Interest* as well as your *Duty* to give Credit to such Evidence, as really and in it self is Credible (and such, I hope I have already shewn that to be which is given us of the Truth of *Christianity*) and not to set your selves to cavil at it, and to study Exceptions to it; not to take upon you to prescribe to G O D Almighty, and boldly to tell him what sort of Evidence he must give you, or else you will not be satisfied.

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Do not then stand in your own Light; do not bring Destruction upon your selves when you may avoid it; but give Ear to what *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles* speak to you in the *Holy Scriptures*; and hear them without Prejudice, with a Mind ready to hearken to Reason, and resolv'd to be persuaded by it; and then what they will say to you will be abundantly *sufficient* to satisfy you; for they say as much in this Case (or more) as by the common Voice and Reason of all Mankind is judged to be sufficient in all other Cases of the like Nature.

But if you are resolv'd not to be persuaded so long as there is any Possibility of Doubt or Scruple left; if you are resolv'd not to Believe unless you may have just that very Evidence given you that you your selves are pleas'd to require; if you will boldly and arrogantly take upon you to teach G O D, (as if he knew it not) what Evidence he ought to give Men of the Truth of Religion; and are resolv'd to find or make Exceptions against any other; Look you to it; For if G O D has done enough already,

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already, he is under no manner of Obligation to do more. More, did I say? Nay he needed not to have done so much; for it was meer Grace and Favour in GOD that he has done so much as he has done; that he has made us any Promises at all, and given us any Assurance of the Truth of them. And therefore for what he has done we ought to be thankful, and not to find fault with him that he has done no more. Such Impudence and Sauciness as this (for I can call it by no better a Name) from a *Man* to his *Maker*, from a *mean inconsiderable Creature*, to the *Great Lord of Heaven and Earth*, is, I'm sure, no proper Qualification to merit extraordinary and peculiar Favours. For as our *Saviour* says to some in a like Case, to some who formerly made the like unreasonable Demand that you now do, *It is an Evil and Adulterous Generation that seeketh after a Sign, and therefore there shall no Sign be given—* Verily I say unto you, *there shall no Sign be given to this Generation.*

Matth. xii. 39.  
Mark viii. 12.

Let us then be content with that assurance which GOD has given us of the Truth of Religion; for greater than this we shall not have till it be too late. Let us *thankfully accept of*, and *readily comply with this*, and not expect or wait for more; for GOD will not gratifie us in our unreasonable Desire. He is resolv'd to deal with us as with Men, to incline, not to determine our Choice; to persuade, not to force us to be Happy. And having already given us the *Standing Revelation* of the Gospel, which is *sufficient* both to instruct and convince us, and having prov'd the Truth of this *sufficiently* to us, he will not be making new Revelations, or  
sending



sending more Prophets Divinely inspir'd, or working fresh Miracles every Day, He has done enough already to satisfy our sober Judgments; and he will not do every thing that we can think of to gratify our wild and extravagant Fancies.

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And there is the less Reason that he should do so, because if the Ordinary Means which he uses for our Conversion do not succeed, the Fault lies wholly in us; And therefore 'tis highly probable (so certain that it needs not be tried) that any other means proper for GOD to use to reclaim us, would be alike unsuccessful. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the Dead.*

This is the *last Reply* that *Abraham* makes to the *Rich Man's Request*; and it was the third of those three Points which I at first propounded to speak to; but which I must reserve for the Subject of my next Discourse.

*New*

we can think of someone out and extra-  
mural; and he will do every thing that  
some enough efforts to make our poster judge-  
ment. He has  
VII

*New Revelations would probably be unsuccessful.*

THE  
Eighth SERMON,  
Preach'd November 4<sup>th</sup> 1700.

St. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

**I**N Discoursing on these Words, I have already done these two Things.

I. I have shewn that the present *Standing Revelation* of GOD's Will in the *Holy Scripture* is abundantly *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. This is intimated in the *first Verse* of the Text; *They have Moses and the*  
Pro-



Serm. *Prophets; (Christ and his Apostles) let them hear them.* And,  
VIII.

II. I have likewise shewn, that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, it is *unreasonable* to desire more. This was what the *Rich Man* had done at the 27th and 28th Verses; and which he still continues to do in the *second Verse* of the Text, even after *Abraham* had told him that the *Standing Revelation* of GOD's Will in the Holy Scripture was *sufficient*; *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

He says it positively; *they will repent*; He speaks it as a thing that no doubt could be made of. In Answer to which therefore *Abraham* tells him in the *last Verse* of the Text, that that which he thought so very certain, was not so much as probable: *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded who' one rose from the dead.*

And this was the third Point I propounded to speak to in discoursing on these Words, *viz.*

III. To shew, that in Case GOD should condescend to gratifie Men in this unreasonable Desire, (working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the Dead, to assure them of a Future State, and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis highly probable that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance by the Preaching and Standing Revelation of the Gospel, would be persuaded by this means. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, (I add, nor Christ and*

and his *Apostles*) neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.

Serm.  
VIII.

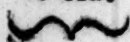
And the Truth of this will, I suppose, sufficiently appear if these following things be consider'd. 1. That we can't have *better* or *stronger Motives* to Obedience and a Holy Life than are already offer'd in the *Holy Scripture* to persuade us. 2. That the *Proof* and *Evidence* already given us of the Truth of Religion is such as cannot be *fairly* excepted against; and that there is no Proof thereof that could be offer'd, but what is liable to *Cavils* and *unreasonable Exceptions*. 3. That if *GOD* should gratifie all Men in this Request, the *Abundance* and *Commonness* of the Miracles that must then be wrought would go near to *destroy* the Efficacy and Persuasiveness thereof. And, Lastly, That it is *Matter of Fact* and *Experience* that new Miracles have been generally unsuccessful upon those who have not hearkned to nor been convinced by a *Standing Revelation* of *GOD's Will*.

1. I say, we can't possibly have, as to the *Matter* of them, *stronger Motives* to Obedience and a Holy Life, than those which are already offer'd in the *Holy Scripture* to persuade us. For there we have *Life and Death* set before us, *Blessing and Cursing*; on one Hand, the *Promise of this Life* and of *that which is to come*; and on the other Hand, all the Evils that we can justly dread; the wrath of him who is a *consuming Fire*; who often punishes Transgressors with remarkable Judgments in this Life, and has threatned to all impenitent Sinners *Eternal Torments* in the next.

Now

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Now if a new Revelation was to be made, and we our selves were to contrive the *Matter* of it; what stronger Motives than these could we think of? Or if one should come from the dead to Preach to us, if *Lazarus* were sent on purpose to persuade us, what could he offer more towards it? Could he give us Assurance of any thing better or more desirable than of *GOD's* Readiness to forgive us upon our Repentance, and of compleat and perfect Happiness both of Body and Soul to all Eternity if we do Repent? Or could he threaten any thing more like to deter us from Sin than intolerable and everlasting Misery? If not, to what purpose should he be sent to us? Or indeed to what Purpose should there be any *new Revelation* at all? For these things are already promised and threatned clearly enough in the *Holy Scripture*; *Life and Immortality* are already fully brought to Light by the Gospel; And if the Hope of Eternal Life and Happiness, and if the Dread of Everlasting and Intolerable Torments will not persuade us, nothing certainly will or can persuade us.

All that, I think, could in any new Revelation be added to that Encouragement that is already given us in Scripture to Virtue and Godliness, or to that Discouragement that is therein given us to Vice and Wickedness, would be an Assurance that there should be always as remarkable a *Difference* made, by the Providence of *GOD*, between good and bad Men, in *this World*, as we are told in Scripture there will be, by his *righteous Judgment* in that which is to come. And a good Assurance given us of this by some new Revelation, confirmed

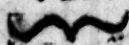


firmed by our own constant Observation that it was always well with the Righteous and ill with the Wicked in this World, we may think perhaps would do much more towards the Reformation of Mankind, than only those Promises and Threatnings of future Happiness or Misery that we meet with in the Scripture have done, or are ever like to do.

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And this indeed might be. But then 'tis to be consider'd that a new Revelation to this Effect would be inconsistent with the Nature of Religion, and would frustrate the Design of GOD in sending us into this World, which was to prove and try us; to see whether we love the Lord with all our Heart; whether we can believe him for those things which we do not see; and whether we are so wise as to prefer a greater future Good before a less that is present, a Blessed and Glorious Immortality after this Life, before the Pleasures of Sin which are but for a Season. For if the Reward of Virtue and the Punishment of Vice were always visible and present, there would be no Room left for Faith in GOD, which is a firm Belief of the Truth of his Promises and Threatnings, tho' we do not see a present Performance of them; Faith (as the Apostle defines it) is the Substance, or (a) confident Expectation of things hoped for; the Evidence, or (b) Conviction of things not seen. And if all the good things both of this Life and of the next were the certain Portion of Virtue, and all the evil things that can be suffer'd both in this World and in the other were the certain and never-failing Consequence of Sin, there would be no room left for a virtuous and wise Choice; nay in-

Heb. xi. 1  
(a) ἡ πίστις  
ἡ οὐρανόθεν  
ἐλπίς. ἡ ἀπο-  
κάλυψις  
ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ  
(b) ἡ ἐκείνη  
ἡ πίστις  
ἡ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ  
ἡ ἐκείνη  
ἡ πίστις

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VIII.

indeed there would be hardly Matter for Choice at all; for it can't be conceiv'd that a Creature that has Understanding and a Power of chusing and refusing, should knowingly chuse all Misery rather than all Happiness. Such a Revelation as this being therefore so evidently inconsistent with the Nature of Faith and Religion, and with the Design of God in sending us into this World, can't be expected. And I say that, bating this, there can be nothing added to the *Matter* of the Scripture Revelation. From whence therefore it plainly follows, that such as are not persuaded by the Gospel Motives to Repentance, are not capable of being persuaded by any such Motives as, consistently with the Nature of Faith and Religion and Virtue, could be offer'd to them; And it can't be suppos'd that any true divine Revelation should ever offer any Motives to persuade us that are not such.

But it may be said perhaps, that tho' better or stronger Motives to Repentance cannot be offer'd by any new Revelation, than are offered already in Holy Scripture, yet we might by a new Revelation, have *better Assurance* given us of the Truth of the Gospel Motives; and that if we had, 'tis very like they would be then more prevailing than they now are.

And this likewise I believe must be granted. But then 'tis to be consider'd, that the Nature of Faith and Religion, and of that State of Trial which we are now in, requires that there should be a reasonable Boundary set to the clearness of that Evidence that is given to Men of the Truth of those Motives whereby they are to be persuaded, as well as to the Force

and

and Strength of the Motives themselves; because (as I noted in my last Discourse) such very clear and strong Evidence of the Truth of Religion as leaves no Room for a possibility of Doubting, would destroy our Freedom of Choice, and, with it, the Virtue and Excellency of Believing; for 'tis not Faith to believe what we see and feel; and 'tis no Commendation to a Man to be Good and Virtuous, if his Virtue be not the Fruit of a wise Judgment and a free Choice; which it would not be if his Judgment was over-born by irrefrable Demonstration. And if that farther Proof and Evidence that is desired of the Truth of Religion, be no other than such as will leave us a Freedom of Choice and a Possibility of Doubting, then I say, 'tis not likely it should be more convincing to us than that which we have already in the Standing Revelation of Holy Scripture. For it may be considered further in the second Place.

2. That the *Proof* and *Evidence* already given us of the Truth of Religion is such as cannot fairly be excepted against; and that there is no *Proof* thereof that could be given us, (unless it be such as is not resistible, and consequently such as is not fit for GOD to give us, while we are here in State of Trial) but what is liable to foolish Cavils and unreasonable Exceptions; so that consequently the same Temper and Disposition of Mind, and the same unwillingness to believe which now dispose Men to Infidelity, and prompt them to make Exceptions to the present Grounds of the Christian Faith, would work the same Effect in case other Proof and Evidence were given of the Truth of it.

R

I say,

Serm.

V. II.



Serm. VIII. I say, first, That the *Proof* and *Evidence* already given us of the Truth of the *Christian Religion* is such as cannot fairly be excepted against.

Serm. III, IV, V, VI. To shew this has been the Design of several former Discourses. And therefore to what has been said I shall only add, that if the Exceptions that are made to the Evidence already given us of the Truth of the *Christian Religion* were fair and reasonable, they would be allowed by Mankind to be so in other Cases of the like Nature; which yet they are not. Nay if they who make these Exceptions in the Case of Religion did themselves think that they were just and reasonable, they ought to make the same in all other Cases that are equally liable to the same Exceptions; and in all other such Cases they ought to live and act as if they had the same Doubts and Scruples upon them, which they say they have in the Case of Religion. But we see the quite contrary every Day we live.

For that same *Infidel* who will not allow of the *Testimony* which was given to our *Saviour* by his *Apostles*, tho' they gave the best Assurance that it was possible for Men to give both of their Knowledge of what they testified, and of their Honesty in relating it, yet readily allows that in all other Cases the *Testimony* of two or three Credible Persons should be received, without any collateral Evidence of the Truth of their Testimony; and thinks it reasonable that all Disputes and Controversies among Men concerning their Civil Rights, their Estates, nay and their Lives too, should be thereby determined. And he that questions whether

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whether the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by the *reputed Authors*, yet makes no Question but that *other Books*, of as ancient or older Date, and of the Authority of which there is not half so much Traditional Evidence, were written by those *Persons* to whom they are *ascribed*; and he would think those very unreasonable Men, who when he was arguing any Point of Learning with them upon the Authority of *Virgil*, or *Cicero*, or *Seneca*, should refuse to admit his Argument till he had first undeniably and demonstratively proved that the *Aeneids* were written by *Virgil*, or that the other Pieces that have been allowed in all Ages ever since to have been written by *Cicero*, or *Seneca*, were not falsely Fathered upon those Authors. The *Infidel* who doubts of the Truth of the *Gospel-History*, at the same time has no Doubt at all of the Truth of *other Histories*, as ancient, and much more possible to be false, and of the Truth of which there is not the hundredth part of that Evidence that there is of the Truth of this. And he that pretends to be uncertain whether there ever was such a Man as *Jesus of Nazareth*, and whether he said and did the things Recorded of him by the *Evangelists*, and whether by the Preaching of his *Apostles* he did spread his *Spiritual Empire* over all the Countries of the World; (An Empire which is still kept up in most of the Countries over which it was first extended, and of which there are evident *Marks* and *Memorials* still remaining even in those Countries that have since revolted from it;) He, I say, that doubts of these things altho' witnessed by the *Writings* of those who were *Eyes*

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Witnesses

Serm. *Witnesses* thereof, yet makes no Doubt but that  
 VIII. there was such a Man as *Alexander the Great*,  
 who lived above three Hundred Years before,  
 and that he translated the Empire of the World  
 from *Persia* to *Greece*; and he also gives full  
 Credit to the other things which he finds related  
 of him, by *Curtius*, *Plutarch* and *Arrian*, altho'  
 none of these Authors were *Eye-Witnesses*  
 of his Wars and Greatness, but either Copied  
 what they wrote from former Histories, or  
 took it up from Report; and altho' there are  
 perhaps no *Remains* of that Empire now left  
 in the World. And if he was but as sure of  
 a good Estate, as that the History of *Alexander's*  
*Expedition and Conquests* is in the  
 main a true History, he would not, I believe,  
 give the Hundreth Part of its Value to ascertain  
 his Title to it.

Those therefore are manifestly unreasonable  
 Exceptions to the Proofs of *Christianity*  
 which no Man will allow, which even those  
 that make them in this Case do not think reasonable  
 to make, in other Cases of the like  
 Nature; so that it is not at all likely that  
 any Person that is not convinced by these  
 Proofs, should be convinced if more were  
 given.

For (as I farther noted) there is no *Proof*  
 that could be given us of the Truth of the  
*Christian Religion*, (unless it be such as is not  
 resistible, and consequently not fit for God  
 to give us, while we are here in a State of  
 Trial) but what is liable to foolish Cavils and  
 unreasonable Exceptions.

This I think is so self-Evident, that nothing  
 plainer or more undeniable can be said to prove  
 it.



it. For tho' the Demonstration of the Truth of Religion were as plain as *Demonstrations* in the *Mathematicks*, yet even these may be cavil'd at by such as will allow of no *Postulata's*, nor grant the Truth of the clearest *Axioms*. Nay there have been *Scepticks* in the plainest *Matters of Sense*, and some have denied *Motion* at the same time that their own Tongues were moving to deny it.

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Not that I think the Demonstration of the Truth of Religion is as clear as any Proposition in *Euclid*, or as the shining of the Sun at Noon, (for that can't be, and I have already given Reasons why, if it might, it should not be so) but it is as clear as such a Matter is capable to be. And I dare be bold to say that there is no other Proof of Religion fit to be offered, or reasonably to be desired, to which a *Sceptick* might not make as just and plausible Exceptions as he can to the Standing Proofs of *Christianity*. For one single *Miracle* done in his own Presence would be nothing near so convincing as the many *Miracles* wrought by *Christ* and his *Apostles* were, of some or other of which there were more than ten Thousand Witnesses; And if he can suppose that so many were deceived in plain Matters of Sense, he may much rather suppose that he, a single *Man*, may be imposed upon. And an *Apparition* of a deceased Friend would be a Matter wherein any one Man might be more probably Cheated, or be more easily persuaded that he was Cheated, than the *Apostles* could be in the *Resurrection* of our Lord, when he was seen by them very frequently, and sometimes by a great Company of them met together, by the

Serm. space of forty Days. And a single *Miracle*  
 VIII. that is over as soon as done, could not make  
 such a deep and lasting Impression upon a Man's  
 Mind, as that *constant Power* of working Miracles, and especially the *Gift of Tongues*, which lasted a whole Life, must needs do upon the *Apostles* and those that lived in their time, who were either Partakers of these Gifts themselves, or constant Witnesses thereof in others.

In short, whatever Miracles we can desire may be wrought for our Conviction, either they must be *seen* by us with our *own Eyes*, or else they must be receiv'd by *Testimony* from others.

And tho' they should be *seen* by us with our *own Eyes*, yet so long as 'tis against our Inclination, or inconsistent with that Love which we bear to the World or to our Sins, to believe that they are true Miracles, we should easily be apt to *fancie* that they were only *melancholy Delusions*, or *Tricks* put upon us by Designing Men, which our first Fright or Amazement hindred us from discovering the Fraud of; and so they would probably have no effect at all upon us longer than till our Fright or Amazement was well worn off.

But if we should only have an Account of them by *Testimony* from others, they would be yet less likely to persuade us; because there can be no Testimony concerning any such Matters of Fact more clear and unexceptionable than that which we have already of the Truth of our *Saviour's* and his *Apostle's* Miracles; so that if we believe not this, we should hardlier believe any other Testimony, because we can scarcely

scarcely have so good Assurance of any Man's Truth as we have of the Sincerity and Veracity of all those who are the present Witnesses to our Religion ; and we can hardly be surer that we hear any Man whom we know, speaking to us, than we are that we hear the *Apostles* speaking to us in the *Books* of the *New Testament*.

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And therefore I think it plainly follows ( as I farther noted ) that the same *Temper* and *Disposition* of *Mind*, and the same *Unwillingness* to believe the Truths of the Gospel, which now dispose Men to Infidelity, and prompt them to study and make Exceptions to the Proofs already given us of the Christian Faith, would work the same Effect if other Proof and Evidence were given of it, and that Men would then quickly make as good Exceptions to that, as they do now to these. For from what has been said, I think 'tis plain that if Men do not see the Truth when 'tis placed in so clear a Light as 'tis in already, the Reason must be because they wilfully shut their Eyes, or else are so blinded by a Love of this World, or of their sinful Lusts, that if the Light were ten times brighter than it is, they would see no more than they do now. And it would be to as little Purpose, in order to the Conviction of such perverse and obstinate Men, to add any more or stronger Proofs of the Truth of Religion, as as it would be to light up a-bundance of Torches to a Man that is quite blind.

For this is indeed the true Cause why Men will not hear *Moses* and the *Prophets*, why they will not believe *Christ* and his *Apostles*, testi-



Serm. fying the certainty of a future State and other  
 VIII. Truths of Religion; 'tis not, I say, because  
 there is any just Exception to their Testimo-  
 ny, but because they do not like the Matter  
 of it, and so are resolved not to believe. They  
 love their Sins so well that they can upon no  
 Account be persuaded to part with them, and  
 being so resolved, it is an easie thing to cavil  
 at any Motives or Arguments that are urged  
 to persuade them to it; Seeing they will not  
 see, and hearing they will not hear nor under-  
 stand; and to Men so obstinately resolved a-  
 gainst Conviction, no Proof can be convincing  
 enough.

And this is the sad effect of Love to Sin;  
 it Viciates the Judgments of Men, so that they  
 can't distinguish between things that differ most  
 vastly; it darkens their Understanding, so that  
 the plainest Proposition or the clearest Conse-  
 quence in the World, if it be against the In-  
 terest of Sin, seems dark and obscure to them;  
 and it renders their Minds so averse to Reli-  
 gion, that they can't with any Patience so much  
 as hear the Arguments that are offered to prove  
 it; And be a Reason never so good, 'tis not  
 to be hoped it should be convincing to a Man  
 who will not hear it, or who will not allow  
 himself calmly to consider it.

From all that hath been said therefore upon  
 this Head, it plainly appears, That the proper  
 Cure of Infidelity is not the Addition of more  
 Proof of the Truth of Religion, but a right  
 Preparation and Disposition of Mind to con-  
 sider well the Proof thereof that is offered;  
 which is sufficient to convince and persuade  
 all those that have a Love of Truth, and a  
 Will

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VIII.

Will disposed to Virtue. The Causes of Infidelity must be first removed, and then the Cure of it will be easie, by those Means which God has provided and directed us to use, and there will be no need of his Working Miracles for Men's Conviction; But 'till the Causes of it are removed, 'tis hardly to be Cured even by a Miracle.

But it will be said perhaps that tho' fresh Revelations and new Miracles might not be sufficient to convince *all*, they might however convince *some*; because there are several Degrees in the Perverseness and Obstinacy of Men. Some indeed there may be whom no such Proof of Religion as is fit to be given us in this State of Trial would persuade, whose Case therefore must be given over as desperate; but then there others, who (as *King Agrippa* was) are *almost persuaded to be Christians*; and when the Scales are already near even, a small weight put into the lightest will make it overbalance the other; so that it may reasonably be hoped that some small Addition to the Proof of Religion (no more than might be made to it without destroying either our Freedom of Choice or the Excellency of Faith and Virtue) would prevail with these *Half Christians*. ACT. XXVI. 28.

And perhaps it might; But God is wiser than we are, and knows better than we what is fit for him to do towards the Conversion of Men. We ought therefore to conclude that he does all that is fit to be done, tho' we do not see but that he might do more.

But this, it may be, will not be taken for an Answer, but will rather be thought a way  
of

Serm. of avoiding a Difficulty too hard to be accounted for. And therefore I say further, VIII. (and it was the third thing which I proposed to be considered,)

3. That if G O D should gratifie all Men in this Request, working new Miracles every Day for the Conviction of particular Persons; Serm. VII. (and, as I have formerly noted, there is no Reason in the World, why any one Man should be gratified in this Request rather than others, when they have all equal Reason and equal Right to desire it; should G O D, I say, gratifie all Men in this Request.) the *Abundance* of the *Miracles* that must then be wrought, would be so far from adding to the Proof of *Christianity*, that it would rather *lessen* or *weaken* that Proof of it which we have already; because Miracles (the properest Proof of a Publick Divine Revelation) would not be then so convincing as they are now.

For that which most of all affects Men in a Miracle is the *Unusualness* of it; because it is such a thing as was never or but rarely before ever seen or heard of; As the *Blind Man* that had been Cured by our *Saviour* well observes, *Job. ix. 32. Since the Beginning of the World hath it not been heard, that any Man hath opened the Eyes of one that was born Blind.* Had it been a common thing it would have been no Miracle; I mean it would not have appeared so; it would not have been thought so by Men. For that which makes Men wonder even at a true Miracle is not so much because it is such an Operation as they cannot give a fair account of by Natural Causes; for this they can't do, (I'm confident I may say they have



have not yet done it) of many of the Works and Productions of Nature; But they therefore conclude such a thing not to be a Natural Operation, because it is not usual, because it is such a thing as was never before known to be done: And if the same thing which now, for this Reason, we should account a Miracle was done every Day, the *Virtuosi*, would presently set themselves to invent, and would quickly fancy they had found out some Natural Solution of it; And I believe there are not many Miracles that have been done which they might not after long Study be able to give as clear and probable an Account of by Natural Causes, as they have done of *Gravity*, of *Fire*, of the *Loadstone*, of *Vision*, of the *Production of Vegetables*, of the *Generation of Animals*, and of many other things which yet are doubtless the Works and Effects of Natural Causes.

So that I say the most probable Consequence of having Miracles so very common as they must be if they were wrought for the Conviction of particular Men, would be this, that they wou'd cease to serve for that Purpose for which Miracles were designed; because being common they would be disregarded, or would quickly be looked upon to be the Effect of Natural Causes only; There would not be wanting some that would offer to give an Account how they were done; and all those would be despised by the Scorners of Religion, as too much addicted to Superstition, who rather than attribute the greatest Miracle to a Supernatural Power would not acquiesce in that Solution (how silly soever) that was given of it by meer *Matter and Motion*.

And

Serm. And in particular, I question not but that  
 VIII. if it was a common thing for dead Men, after they had lain in their Graves for some time, to come forth again and shew themselves alive to their Friends, this wonderful Effect would be attributed by a great many to some *Vital Principle* in the Body, which only Slept for a while (as it does in Corn or other Seeds while they are kept dry and above Ground) but afterwards, when the Body was buried a while, was excited by some Natural Virtue that was in the Earth to exert it self, and so by its *Plastick Power* formed the Body into the same shape it was in before.

This I say would in all probability be the Effect that the greatest Miracles would have in the World, if they were very common; They'd only serve to set the *Philosophers Wits* to work to invent *new Forms of Matter*, and *new Laws of Motion* by which to solve them; and any Solution of them, tho' never so improbable, tho' only by *Occult Qualities*, would serve turn, and be thought better than to recur to an Almighty Power. The Consequence of which would be, that this which we desire as an additional Proof of Christianity, would in effect *destroy* one of the best Proofs of it that we have already. But,

4. Lastly, If it be supposed that Miracles would still be thought Miracles notwithstanding their Commonness, yet *Abraham* might well deliver it as a General Truth, to which there are none or very few Exceptions; that he who is not wrought upon by a Standing Revelation of GOD's Will, would not be persuaded by an extraordinary Message or a new  
 Miracle;

Miracle; because it is *Matter of Fact* and *Experience* that this last Method has been generally unsuccessful upon those who have not hearkned to nor been convinced by a Standing Revelation.

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For this was the very Case of the *Jews* in our *Saviour's* time; the Parable was literally fulfilled in them. For as they would not believe *Moses* and the *Prophets* testifying of our *Saviour*, so neither did they any more believe our *Saviour* himself when he came down to them from Heaven, in the *Power* of *GOD*; And as they did not believe him while he *lived* amongst them, and went about Preaching and doing Miracles, so neither did they believe him a jot more after he *came again* to them from the *dead*. Never were there such Signs and Miracles wrought for Mens Conversion, and yet never was there such a number of obstinate Infidels as then. Very few even of those who were Eye-witnesses of our *Saviour's* Miracles were the better for them, but many were a great deal worse, wilfully blaspheming that *Spirit* by which he wrought them, and attributing those Operations to the Help of the *Devil* which they were convinced in their own Judgments were done by the *Power* of *GOD*.

*The opening the Eyes of the Blind*, did but make John ix. 39. those that saw the Miracle more *blind* than they were before; And when once a *dead Lazarus* did come forth out of his Grave and appear ix. 47.  
xii. 10. to them, (which was the very thing that the *Rich Man* here desires in the behalf of his Brethren, as being in his Judgment the most powerful, and so like to be the most effectual method to reclaim them; when, I say, this was done



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done by our *Saviour* in the presence of a great number, so that the Truth of the Miracle could not be doubted, and was not denied by any of them) all the Effect that it had upon those obstinate and incredulous Men, was only that it made them enter presently (sooner perhaps than otherwise they would have done) into a close *Consultation* to put to Death both *Jesus* and *Lazarus* too.

Some Examples indeed, it must be granted, there are on the other side; For we are told in *Acts* ii. 41. of a great number about three thousand that believed upon the first Preaching of *St. Peter*, and sight of that great Miracle, the *Gift of Tongues*, wherewith the *Apostles* were endued.

Verse 13.

But then it may be considered, that it was not the Miracle that convinced them, I mean not that alone; for many that were then present, and heard the *Apostles* speaking with *Tongues*, were so far from being persuaded thereby, that they most falsely blasphemed that, as they had done all our *Saviour's* Miracles before, attributing the fruit of that most evident Power of the *Holy Ghost* to new Wine. And it may be further noted that those who were persuaded by it, were such as before they saw the Miracle were in a good Disposition to embrace that pure Religion that is taught in the Gospel, or else that Miracle would not have persuaded them; for the Persons convinced thereby were not of the *Pharisees* or unbelieving *Jews* that had rejected our *Saviour* before, but they were *Devout Persons*, *Jews* or *Profelytes*, who had come at that Feast of *Pentecost*, from other Parts of the World to

Verse 5.

*Jeru-*

Jerusalem to Worship, and who had probably never heard of our *Saviour* before more than by uncertain Report; but being well read in *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and giving good heed to them, were Converted, more by the manifest Accomplishment of all the ancient Prophecies concerning the *Messias*, in the Person of our *Saviour*, than by the sight of that great Miracle.

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This therefore being Matter of Fact and Experience, what has been done and come to pass already, that new Miracles have been generally unsuccessful upon such as have not regarded a Standing Revelation of GOD's Will, we may reasonable infer that 'tis highly probable, if not certain, that the same Experiment tried over again would have no better success.

The Sum of all therefore is this; such as are (as St. *Luke* says they were who were Converted by the Preaching and Miracles of the *Apostles*) \* *Predisposed or fitted for Eternal Life*; that is, such as are modest and teachable, who hear without Prejudice, and judge without Partiality, and have no Interest of Sin, or the World that stands in competition with their Desire to obtain everlasting Happiness; such as enquire out the Truth with the same Indifference that a Traveller does his Way, who has no Inclination to one Way more than to another, but only desires to be directed right, and is resolved to take that way which he is persuaded is the right, tho' it should not prove so very clean and smooth and pleasant as he hoped it would; (such, I say, as are of this honest and docible mind) will be persuaded by

Act. xiii. 42.  
\* Τεταγ-  
μενοι εἰς  
τὸ εὐαγγέλιον  
ἀποδεχόμενοι.

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by a good Reason, especially if it be as good as the Matter is capable of, tho' it falls short of Demonstration; and if there be Reason or appearance of Reason on both sides, they will judge on that side on which the Reasons seem most weighty; and for the Conviction of such as these, the Standing Revelation of the Gospel, being so well proved as it is, is abundantly sufficient; so that such shall not need new Miracles or new Revelations. And on the other side, such as only do need them, that is such as being of perverse Minds, and stubborn Wills, and devoted to Sin, will not hearken to *Moses* and the *Prophets*, nor to *Christ* and his *Apostles* speaking in the *Scripture*, would very probable receive no Benefit from new Miracles or new Revelations. For nothing will serve to convince those who will not be convinced at all; no Arguments can be sufficient to persuade a Man to that which he is strongly prejudiced and fully resolved against; And this being the Case of all those who do not hear *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles* Preaching to them in the *Holy Scripture*, or are not persuaded by them, we may well conclude with *Abraham* in the Text, that any other means that might be used to reclaim them would most probably prove as ineffectual as this has been, and that they would not be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.

And now having shewn that the present Standing Revelation of God's Will in the *Holy Scripture* is sufficient to convince and persuade Men; having also shewn that more Proof and Evidence than we have of the Truth of our Religion cannot



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cannot reasonably be desired; And having likewise shewn that any other Proof or Evidence thereof would probably be ineffectual upon those who will not hear *Moses* and the *Prophets* and *Christ* and his *Apostles* preaching to them in the *Holy Scripture*; I have finish'd all that I propos'd to do in discoursing on these Words.

I shall conclude all with an useful *Exhortation*; first to *Infidels*, who will not by all that has been said be persuaded to admit this *divine Revelation*; and secondly to *Christians* who do receive it.

1. To you who are yet *Infidels*, (if there are any such here, as I hope there are not; or if these Discourses shall happen to fall into the Hands of any such) I beg leave to address myself in a few words.

And I would desire you, in the first Place, to prepare and dispose your Minds to hear gravely and without prejudice the Reasons that are offer'd to prove the Truth of *Christianity*, by considering seriously the great Importance of Religion, if it be true. And if you do but consider this, you will quickly see that it is well worth your while to be at some pains to satisfy your selves fully whether Religion be true or not. For if Religion be true (and you can't be sure 'tis not, till you have well examin'd the Grounds and Proofs of it) you have a great Concern at stake; and in a Matter of such Moment it becomes not a Wise Man to be determin'd by a Jest or a Quibble. And if you seriously consider the great Importance of Religion, you will likewise readily see, that of the two you had much better be mistaken in believing the Truth of Religion, tho' it be false, than

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than in *disbelieving* it, if indeed it be true; so that consequently if it can ever be reasonable for a Wise Man to be under a *Prejudice*, it would be most reasonable that you should be *prejudiced* on the side of Religion. You will also then see that if in any Case it be Wisdom to be *over-credulous*, that is, to believe beyond the strength of the Evidence, it is so in the Case of Religion; because the greatest Damage you can suffer by *Over-credulity*, in case Religion be all a Cheat, is infinitely less than will be the Consequence of *unreasonable Infidelity*, if indeed Religion be true.

*Next*, I would desire you to examine yourselves seriously, whether in your Enquiries into the Grounds and Reasons of Religion, you have not hitherto had some *Byass* upon your Minds; whether at the same time that you have set yourselves to consider of the Proofs of the *Christian Religion*, you have not secretly *wished* that you might not find them satisfactory to your Reason. And if so, I desire you to examine further, what was the *Cause* of this; whether it was not some worldly *Pleasure* or *Profit* which you foresaw you should be debarr'd from in Case you should happen to be convinc'd of the Truth of the *Christian Religion*. And if it was, I hope that that same serious *Consideration* of the great *Importance* of Religion, which I before advis'd in order to the removing unreasonable Prejudices, will also suffice to satisfy you how unworthy of any Love or Regard any Worldly Pleasure or Profit is in Comparison with that Eternal Happiness which is promis'd in the Gospel; so that consequently when you are enquiring into the Grounds and Reasons of

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of our Hope of that Eternal Life, all other Thoughts ought to be laid aside, and you ought to have no Eye at all to any thing else; because to a Man who must be unspeakably happy or miserable to all Eternity (which is the Case of all of us, if indeed Religion be true) 'tis not a matter worth thinking of, whether his Worldly State and Condition will be rendered better or worse by his endeavouring to secure to himself a blessed Portion in the other World.

And if by these Considerations your Minds shall be freed from *Prejudices* and from all *Byass* of *Worldly Interest*, I would, after this, desire you to take afresh into your Consideration what has been offer'd in the foregoing Discourses for the Proof of the *Christian Religion*, and the much more that has been better said by others upon the same Argument; for there can be no Hurt in considering these things over and over again, altho' after all, you should remain as unsatisfy'd as you are now. But I can't but hope, I can't but think, that if you do consider without Prejudice or Partiality the Reasons that have been offer'd to prove the Truth of *Christianity*, you must needs be convinc'd thereby.

However, if the Reasons that are or may be offer'd for the Proof of it should not be sufficient perfectly to cure your *Infidelity* and to make you become *Zealous Christians*; they may be, and they certainly are, sufficient to satisfy you that the *Christians* have some Reason for their Belief; even the same at least (if not better) that you your selves are sway'd by in all other Cases; and consequently that they are not such very easy and credulous Fools as you perhaps



Serm. have hitherto taken them to be. I'm confident you must grant that if the Reasons of our  
 VIII. Religion are not demonstrative, they are at least *probable*; and that if our Religion be not true, it has at least a fair *shew* and *Appearance* of Truth.

And if you will but only allow this, 'tis then a Reasonable Request, and what I would *next* desire of you; not to make a *Boast* of your *Unbelief*; not to *ridicule* our holy *Religion*; not to make it your Business to *proselyte* Men to *Atheism* and *Infidelity*.

1. Not to make a *Boast* of your *Unbelief*; For if indeed you have no Religion, yet what *Interest* can you have in telling the World so? Nay is there any thing that you could do, more to your own Prejudice? For tho' you are not under the Direction and Influence of any Religious Principles, yet so long as you appear to have some Religion you will be employ'd and trusted as other Men are; Men will believe you to be Honest 'till they shall find to the contrary; and in the mean time you will have an Opportunity of raising your selves to Wealth and Honour. But when once the World shall come to know that you are Men of no Principles, that you are under no Restraints of Conscience, that you will do whatever you can safely do for your own Advantage; that is, whatever you can do without danger of a Prison, a Pillory or a Gibbet; (and they will have Reason to think all this of you when you your selves shall tell them that you are of no Religion;) Who, do you think, will employ you? Who, do you think, will trust you? So that the only way you will then

then have to make your Fortunes, will be by open Force and Violence; and in that you will meet with such opposition from all the World, as will quickly work your Ruine.

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But you think, it may be, that 'tis a mean and ungenerous thing to disown your Principles, or rather your *no Principles*; that it is beneath a Man to seem to be what he is not; and to put on a face of Religion when he has none, how profitable soever his Hypocrisie might be to him.

Very well; then you may (if you are willing to suffer the Inconvenience of it) freely own your selves to be of no Religion; but at the same time you should do well to consider that the greatest part of the World is against you; that not only the Ignorant and Illiterate, but the Wisest, the Gravest, the most Learned and the most Noble Persons have generally been Men of Religion; or at least, (which is all we can judge by) have outwardly profess'd themselves persuaded of the Truth of it, and have express'd the greatest Zeal and Concern for it. And therefore—

2. Tho' you do believe nothing of it your selves, and scorn to conceal your Unbelief, you may however be *civil* to our Religion; for 'tis but *good Manners* to treat with some Respect that which those with whom you converse account Sacred. Besides, whether Religion be true or false, the Subject of it is *grave*, and therefore ought to be handled with a decent *Reverence*. Do not then shew such ill Breeding as to make that the Subject of your *Sport* and *Raillery*, which all besides your selves account the most serious thing in the World.

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Isa. xli. 21.

Be not guilty of so much Indecency as to discourse of any Matter in a manner so unsuitable to the Nature of it. But if you will needs be attacking our Religion, compose your selves first to Gravity and Seriousness; and let it be seen by your way of Treating us, that your Design is manly and generous, only to undeceive and disabuse us, not to make Sport with us. *Produce your Cause* (as the Prophet speaks) and *bring forth your strong Reasons*; by them, it may be, if you propound them seriously, you may convince us that we are in a Mistake; but we are now in too grave an Humour to be wrought upon by a *Jest*; and how strong soever your Objections against Religion are, by a light and trifling way of expressing them, you will make them lose all their Force. But indeed——

3. To what purpose is it for you to make it your Business, any ways, or by any Arguments, to endeavour to *proselyte* Men to *Atheism* and *Infidelity*.

For whether our Religion be true or false, it is *better* for *you*, as well as for all the World besides, that it should be generally believ'd; and that Men should think themselves oblig'd to live according to the Rules and Precepts of it. You can't, surely, be so unacquainted with the World, if you have liv'd any time in it; or read any thing of History, but that you must needs know that before the Principles of *Atheism* and *Deism* prevail'd so much as they have done of late Years, there was a great deal more Truth and Justice and Honesty and fair Dealing in the World than there is now. So that if you should succeed in your Endeavour,



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if you should be able either to reason or to laugh Religion quite out of the World, the most probable, nay the most certain Consequence of it would be, that when the *Godly Man ceased*, the *faithful* would also fail from among the *Children of Men*; that then they would speak *Vanity* every one with his *Neighbour*, with *flattering Lips* and with a *double Heart* would they speak; That then *Strength* would be the *Law of Justice*, and that which is feeble would be found nothing worth.

Ps xii. 1, 2.

Wisd. ii. 14.

If therefore you have (as you think perhaps you have) found out the *Cheat of Religion*; 'tis your best Prudence, however, to keep your Discovery to your selves. Delight your selves as much as you will with the Contemplation of your own Happiness above other Men, in that you are now freed from the Terrors of Conscience and the Fears of another World, by means of that notable Discovery which you have made of the *Vanity of Religion*; please your selves as much as you will with thinking that you are not now, as others are, ty'd to speak truth when 'tis to your disadvantage, to suffer any thing in this World for Conscience sake, or to be just and honest in your Dealings, when you can get considerably by Fraud and Oppression, and can order the Matter so secretly as to be safe from Discovery, and consequently from all Shame and Punishment from Men: But be the Advantage which you have gain'd to your selves by discovering the Cheat of Religion never so great, yet the greater it is, and the greater you think it, so much the more cautious you ought to be not to make known to others what you have so happily

Serm. discover'd; for when once others shall come  
VIII. to know as much as you think you do, *viz.*

That all *Religion* is a *Cheat*, all your Advantage above them will cease; they will then be all upon the same Terms with you; they will then be all as much at Liberty to defraud, oppress or otherwise injure you, as you are now to defraud oppress or injure them. You ought not therefore in Prudence, to try to convince them of their Mistake, tho' you were sure it was a Mistake; for why should you make it your Business to cut in sunder those Cords of Religion, by which they are now ty'd up from doing you mischief?

In a word; either Religion is *true* and *well-grounded*, or it is *not*; and which soever it be, it is better both for *them* that do believe the Truth of it, and for *you* also, that they should continue in the Belief of it; why then should you be at Pains only to do mischief?

For put Case, *first*, that Religion is *vain* and *groundless*, it must be confess'd however that it is of some *present Advantage* to *them* that do believe it; because it serves to bear them up under the unavoidable Pains and Troubles and Misery of this Mortal Life with the comfortable Hope of a blessed Immortality; and it will be no Disadvantage to them hereafter; for when they are dead, if indeed there be no Life after this, they will be as if they had never been, they will not be then in a Capacity of grieving for their Disappointment. And it is also for *your present Advantage*, that they that are mistaken in believing the Truth of Religion, should *continue* in their Mistake; because it makes them better to you in every Relation

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Relation than they would otherwise be, more Just and Merciful Governours, more Loyal and Obedient Subjects, more Loving Parents, more Dutiful Children, more Gentle Masters, more Faithful Servants, and more Just, Honest and Loving Neighbours; why then should you be at any Pains to Cure that Mistake (if it be a Mistake) which does *them* no harm, but rather good; and which is likewise so profitable for *you*? Especially when you can't be so vain as to expect to merit Heaven (if indeed there be no Heaven) by your Zeal for the Truth of *Atheism*.

But if indeed Religion be true; (and you can't be sure it is not, how deficient soever you may think our Proofs of it are) as I shall not need to say that it will be better for *them* that *believe* it, that they should persist in their Belief of it; so I shall not need to say much to shew that it will, in the Event, be better for *you*, that you should not endeavour to *pervert* them; for, certainly, if there be a Hell, they will be condemned to the hottest place in it, who not only withdrew themselves from their Subjection to Almighty GOD, and would not suffer him to reign over them; but made it also their Business to *corrupt* others, to form a Party against Heaven, and to raise an Universal Rebellion against GOD.

These things, and more to the like Purpose I would say to the *Atheists*, if I thought they were here to hear me. And I should not be without Hope, that altho' what was said before in the fore-going Discourses was not sufficient to cure their *Infidelity*, what has been  
now



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now said might serve to convince them that it is the *wisest Course* to keep their *Infidelity* to themselves; that how little soever they believe of the Truth of Religion, it is not *Prudence* to tell the World that they are Men of no Principles, and consequently not fit to be employed or trusted; that 'tis not *good Manners* to make a Jest of Serious and Sacred things, and to affront the common Reason and Judgment of Mankind; and that 'tis not for their *Interest* to endeavour to bring other Men over to their side, because if none had more Religion than themselves, they could not be near so safe and secure in their Rights and Possessions, and in their Lives (the only things they value) as they now are.

But I do not think there are any here present concern'd in this Part of my Discourse, and therefore shall lengthen it no further. *I am persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation; For your Presence here, in the House of GOD, and in the Assembly of Christians, makes it reasonable to believe, that you are already convinc'd, not only of the Being and Providence of GOD, but likewise of the Truth of the Christian Religion and of the Divine Inspiration and Authority of the Holy Scriptures.*

2. To you therefore who are *Christians* I shall now turn my Discourse. *And I beseech you, Brethren, suffer the word of Exhortation; it is only this.*

Since you have *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles*, and believe that they are *Messengers* sent to you from GOD to instruct you in his Will; receive the Truth and the

the Law at their Mouths ; mind what they say, and be careful to follow their Directions in all things. Serm. VIII.

For even *we* who have the *Scriptures*, the *lively Oracles of God*, may perish for want of Knowledge as well as they that have them not, unless we make that Use of them which they were given for ; unless we are diligent in reading them, and careful to practise what they teach. For the *Rich Man* spoken of in this *Parable* had the *Scriptures*, but his meer having them did not keep him from *Hell*. And his *five* surviving *Brethren* had likewise the *Scriptures*, and yet were then in a fair way of following their *Brother* to that *Place of Torment*. They had *Moses and the Prophets* but they did not hear them.

And this also may be our Case, who have not only *these*, but also *Christ* and his *Apostles* Preaching to us, if we do not hear them ; for what Advantage can it be to us to have good Instructors, if we will not mind what they say ; if we stop our Ears to all their Counsels and Reproofs ? No Man was ever made a Scholar only by having a good Library in his Possession : No Man ever learnt any Art or Science, tho' it was never so well taught in any Book, only by keeping the Book in his Chamber, or carrying it about in his Pocket. And as little shall we be the wiser only by having the Holy *Scriptures*, tho' (as the *Apostle* says) 2 Tim. iii. 15 they are able to make us wise unto Salvation, if we do not read and study them with an honest Design to furnish our selves from thence with a stock of useful Knowledge, and with a firm Resolution to lead our Lives according to the Directions which they give us. Nay

Serm. . Nay so far shall we be from receiving any

VIII. Advantage only by our having the Holy Scri-

ptures given us, and free Liberty allow'd us to look into them, (a Privilege we of this Nation have above most of our Neighbours) that if we do not read and study them, it will be much the worse for us; our Condemnation will be the greater, and our Destruction so much the more certain. For the Case of those who offend thro' Ignorance, when their Ignorance is unaffected, is very pitiable; and tho' we can't certainly say how GOD will deal with those who had no clear Revelation of his Will made to them; this we may be sure of, that GOD, who is a *merciful GOD*, will deal *mercifully* with them. *If I had not come and spoken unto them, says our Saviour, they had not had Sin.*

Joh. xv. 22.

Luk. xii. 47.

But the Case will be quite otherwise with those, who *knew their Master's will and did not do it*; They, as our Saviour says, *shall be beaten with many Stripes*. And it will be all one if they did not know it, if their Ignorance of it was occasion'd by their own fault, in neglecting those Means of Knowledge which GOD had afforded them; And much rather, if their ignorance of their Duty was affected and chosen, that they might Sin with less disturbance of Mind; for our Saviour's Judgment in this Case is very plain (and 'tis his Judgment by which we must stand or fall to all Eternity) *Joh. iii. 19. This is the Condemnation that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkness rather than Light, because their Deeds were Evil.*

Having therefore *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and also *Christ* and his *Apostles* continually Preaching to us in the *Books of Holy Scripture*, let us hear them;



them; This is both our Duty and our Interest. Sermon.

And that our study of the Scripture may be with good success, and we may thereby be *thoroughly furnished unto all good Works*, Let us pray as we are taught by our Church in a most excellent Collect suited to the Subject I have been Discoursing of. **VIII.**

*Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our Learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by Patience and Comfort of thy Holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed Hope of everlasting Life which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Collect for  
2d. Sunday  
in Advent.

The

And that our body of the scriptures may be with good success, and we may thereby be brought forth into all good works, let us pray as we are taught by our Church in a well known Collect, which to the subject I have been mentioning of

Blessed Lord, who hastenest all things, hasten to be written for our country. O Lord, that we may be in such wise benefited, read, study, learn, and do, as shall best please thee, that by thy grace and favour we may attain to thy glory, and ever hold the blessed hope of everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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*The Unreasonableness of Separation.*

A  
S E R M O N,

Preach'd at *Brent-wood* in *Essex*,  
at the Lord Bishop of *London's*  
VISITATION.

October 7<sup>th</sup>. 1693.

S<sup>t</sup> JOHN VI. 66, 67, 68.

*From that time many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

*Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?*

*Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*

**I**N these Words there are four things considerable.

I. A Remarkable Accident that befel our Saviour in the Course of his Ministry, his being



Serm. ing deserted at once by a great many of his  
IX. Disciples: *Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

II. The Occasion of this great Desertion, intimated in that Clause, *ex tunc, from that time, or upon that occasion.*

III. A Question thereupon put by our Lord to those few that still remain'd with him: *He said unto the twelve, will ye also go away?* And,

IV. And Lastly, The honest and discreet Answer which Simon Peter in the name of the rest return'd to this Question; *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

Each of which Particulars will afford some useful Observations, which in the Sequel of this Discourse I shall briefly touch upon, (the time not permitting me to do more) and then make some Application of the whole. I begin with the first, *viz.*

I. The Relation of a Remarkable Accident that befel our Saviour in the Course of his Ministry, *viz.* his being deserted at once by a great many of his Disciples: *Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.* The Evangelist doth not say how many, but that we may probably collect from the former part of the Chapter: For at the 10th Verse we are told, That the number of those that were with him before, and had been miraculously fed by him with five Barley-loaves, and two small Fishes, was about five thousand, and that upon that they all of them acknowledg'd that he was the Christ, as you may see at the 14th Verse, *This is of a truth (say they) that Prophet which should come into the World;* and thereupon presuming (according to the Notion generally

rally receiv'd among the *Jews* at that time ) Sermon.  
 that the *Messias* was to be a mighty Temporal Prince, they would fain then have persuaded him to take upon him the Kingdom. Nay, IX.  
 as the *Evangelist* notes at the 15th Verse, *They would have taken him by force, and made him a King*; which when our *Saviour* had avoided by conveying himself privately away, they would not however be thereby diverted from pursuing their Intention; but perceiving which way his Disciples were gone over the Sea, and supposing that he had appointed to meet them on the other side, they took Shipping the very next day to follow him; and when they had found him, knowing that he had not gone over in the same Boat with his Disciples, and that no other Boat had gone over besides, except those wherein they themselves had pass'd, so that consequently he must needs have convey'd himself over the Sea by a Miracle; they seem'd hereby still the more confirm'd in that belief which they had of him before; and yet behold on a sudden, even the very same day, upon occasion of some disgust which they took at his Doctrine, they all forsook him, leaving him (as it seems) alone, only with his twelve Apostles. *Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.* From whence we may observe,

1. That Infallibility itself is not sufficient to prevent Schisms and Separations in the Church. For surely they will not deny that our Blessed Lord and Saviour himself was an infallible Teacher, who believe that his pretended *Vicar* is so; and yet for all that, he was deserted by a great many of his Disciples; there were many more

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that forsook him, than there were that continu'd to adhere to him. Nay, indeed his Infallibility may be said in some sense to have been the occasion of this great Schism; for the reason of their forsaking him was, because he spake to them the words of Truth; for had he but suited his Doctrine to the Carnal Palates of his Hearers, they would still have continu'd with him.

And if Infallibility will not serve for this purpose, there is, manifestly, no such absolute necessity, no such great usefulness of an Infallible Guide in the Church, as the *Romanists* pretend; who also from thence only, without any ground from Scripture, boldly infer that there is such an one. For we have already an Infallible Rule both of Belief and Practice in the Holy Scriptures, and this Rule is sufficiently plain to, and easily enough applicable by, all such as are of honest minds, and give due Attention and Regard to it. An Infallible Guide (if there were any such now-a-days) could not teach more than the Holy Scriptures do, of such things as are necessary to be known by us; neither could he teach the same things plainer than they teach them; and if men were of perverse and carnal minds, they would give no more heed to the Infallible Guide, than they do now to the Infallible Rule; that is, they would hear him no longer than while his Doctrine pleas'd them, or while it was for their advantage to continue in his Communion; and when either his Doctrine was ungrateful, or it was not safe to adhere to him; they would do by him, as the Disciples in the Text did by our *Saviour*, who was beyond all dispute



pote an Infallible Teacher; *They would go back, and walk no more with him.* Sermon.

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2. Another thing that may be observ'd from hence, is this, That it is no just Objection against any *Church*, that there are a great many that dislike it, and separate from it.

Let not then our Adversaries of the *Church of Rome* any more object against us (as they have us'd to do) that their *Church* is at Unity within itself, that they are all of one Mind, agreeing in the same Form of Doctrine, and holding together in the same Worship; whereas no sooner did the *Reform'd Churches* separate from them, but they were immediately divided into innumerable *Sects* among themselves; each pretending to greater Purity and Perfection than the other. For besides that the truth of this matter of fact might be well doubted, viz. whether there be greater Divisions among *Protestants*, than among *Papists*; which Point I will not at this time dispute; This I dare boldly say, That the Unity which they boast of, is in great measure owing to the Inquisition, and such other means of holding their People in their Communion, as we neither do, nor think lawful to use.

And then after all, the Separation of other *Sects* from the *Reform'd Churches*, is not a juster Objection against them, than the Separation of the *Reform'd Churches* themselves from the *Church of Rome* (with which they once held Communion) is against that *Church*: So that if there be any thing in this Argument, it holds every whit as strong against them, as against

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But the truth of it is, the Argument it self is of no force against either one or the other. But in the Case of Separation the only point to be consider'd, in order to the discerning where the blame lies, is for what cause the Separation was made. For if the ground of our separating from the *Roman Church* be, (as indeed it was) because we could not communicate with her without Sin, this justifies our Separation, and is indeed a just Objection against that *Church* which enjoyn'd such unlawful terms of Communion. And on the other side, if the Doctrine that we profess and teach be Pure and Orthodox, and our Worship (to say the least of it) such as may in every part of it be lawfully join'd in; if even they who dissent from us, cannot fix on any one thing in our Communion which they can prove is unlawful; if consequently the ground of their Separation from us, be either because *they will not endure sound Doctrine*, or because they have *itching Ears*, which nothing will please but Novelties; they indeed are highly to blame who separate from us upon such trifling Accounts; but it is no more a just Objection against our *Church*, That there are some that separate from it; than it was against that *Church* which was at first Assembled, and govern'd by our Lord himself in Person, that there were some who when they had list'd themselves under him as his Disciples, did afterwards (upon an unreasonable and groundless disgust) *go back and walk no more with him*.

3. What may further be observ'd from hence in general, is this, That the Example of a Multitude is not a sufficient inducement to follow their

their practice, any further than the same may be justify'd by reason. For in the Text we are told, that many of our *Lord's* Disciples (probably not fewer than five thousand) went away from him at once, and (as far as appears by the History) there were only twelve that remain'd with him, a very small number in comparison with that great Multitude that went away; and yet there can be no doubt, but that these were the *True Church*, and that they which went away were *Schismaticks*.

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From whence therefore (by the way) we may observe, how vain and trifling that Argument is, which they of the *Church of Rome* do urge in behalf of their *Church*, and to persuade us to return to it, taken from the great Multitude of those that are of the *Roman Communion*, in comparison with the *Reformed Churches*.

For granting that the *Roman Church* is of much greater extent than the *Reform'd*; nay, if we should grant it to be of larger extent than all the *Christian Churches* besides, that are not of her Communion (which yet is certainly false) this is but a very sorry Argument to prove her to be the True, and only True *Christian Church*.

For if truth be always on the side of the greatest number, Which was the *True Church* in *Abraham's* time, when he was of a Religion by himself? Was it in his small Family, or amongst the *Idolatrous Nations* that dwelt round about him? Or which was the *True Church* in all that long Tract of time from *Moses* to our *Saviour*? Was it not confin'd to a very small spot of Land, even when it was at its largest



Serm. extent? And that again contracted to a much less compass in *Elijah's* time, when there were not in *Ten* of the *Tribes of Israel*, above *Seven thousand men* who had not bowed the knee to the image of *Baal*?

IX  
1 Kings xix.  
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Again, if that be always the *True Church* which is the largest, time was when the *Arian Hereticks* were the *True Christian Church*, and the *Orthodox Professors of Christianity* (who were but a very few in number, in comparison with them) were consequently miserably deluded, and rank *Hereticks*. And thus, according to this Rule given by the *Romanists* for finding out the *True Church*, Truth and Goodness are really nothing at all, but vary according to the Fancies and Customs of Men; and what is true and good now, may in the next Age become very false and wicked.

But by what hath been said, it appears, that the true Worshipers of *GOD* have sometimes been but a very few, and that the *True Church of Christ* has in some Ages consisted but of a very small number; and what has been once, may be again. So, that tho' we should grant that the *Roman Church* is larger than any one, or even than all the *Reform'd Churches* together; yet still these may be the *True Churches of Christ*, and that not. For why may not the *True Religion*, and the right *Worship of GOD* be confin'd to a narrow compass now, as well as it hath been in former times?

The truth is, Number or Fewness, are both meerly accidental and extrinsecal things; sometimes a multitude may be in the right, and sometimes (probably much oftner) they are in the wrong; and whether they be in the right

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right or no, is a thing to be enquir'd into, not to be taken for granted. For Truth and Goodness are always the same, but the Fancies and Opinions of Men are infinitely various and uncertain. And therefore seeing GOD hath not left it to us to determine among our selves by most Votes, which is the true Religion, and the Right Worship of GOD, but hath himself clearly stated and fully determin'd this matter in the Books of Scripture many hundred years ago, that Determination of his is, and will ever be most undoubtedly true; 'tis that therefore that we must stick to, and abide by, let the Crowd, or the Multitude go which way it will.

And so much for the first thing; *Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

II. The second thing which I took notice of in the words, was the occasion of this great Schism, intimated in that Clause, *ἐκ τούτου, from that time*, or (as it may be rendred) upon that occasion: *Many of his disciples went back.*

Now what the occasion was, we must learn from the foregoing part of the Chapter; and it was (in short) this.

Our Saviour well knowing the Hypocrisie of that great Crowd that follow'd him, and that all their pretended Zeal for him was really nothing else but Interest, plainly tells them of it, Verse 26. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me not because ye saw the Miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled; and thereupon takes occasion to persuade them to withdraw their Hearts and Affections from this World, and from their Temporal Interests and Concernments, and to give themselves up to*

Serm. be instructed by him in the way and means of  
 IX. Salvation, *Ver. 27. Labour not for the meat which  
 perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto  
 everlasting life, which the son of man shall give  
 unto you, for him hath God the Father sealed.*  
 And this Subject he prosecutes in the remain-  
 ing part of the Chapter, shewing by many Ar-  
 guments, that there was no way for them to  
 attain to the Blessedness of the other World,  
 but by receiving and believing his Doctrine,  
 and leading their Lives according to it. And  
*ex tēte* upon this occasion, *many of them went  
 back, and walked no more with him.* While he  
 fed them with the Loaves, and while they ho-  
 ped he would be a Temporal King, and that  
 they (as being the first that had declar'd for  
 him) should be preferr'd to great Places and  
 Dignities under him, so long he could not get  
 rid of their Company, tho' he had endeavour'd  
 to do it; but when once he came to tell them  
 plainly of their faults, and to dissuade them  
 from minding so much as they did the Interests  
 of this World; when he had acquainted them  
 that his Kingdom was a Spiritual Kingdom,  
 and that the only way for them to be made  
 Partakers of it, was by carefully observing those  
 strict Rules of Holiness and Virtue which he  
 taught; at this they were greatly offended;  
 and it was now as hard to keep them toge-  
 ther, as it was before to dismiss them; Upon  
 this occasion *many went back, and walked no more  
 with him.*

From whence we may observe (and 'tis the  
 only thing I shall at present observe from hence)  
 That 'tis the Duty of those who are *Ministers*  
 of the Gospel boldly to speak the Truth, and  
 reprove



reprove Vice, whatever offence may be taken at them for it. Serm. IX.

In other things indeed it becomes them (and it is a part of that prudence which it is their duty to exercise in their behaviour towards others) to be as compliant and complaisant as they can; and according to St. Paul's Example, to be *made all things to all men, that they may by all means gain some*; But the Truth of the Gospel is not to be parted with upon any terms, neither may they upon any consideration whatsoever sooth up their People in their Sins, and cry *peace, peace, when there is no peace*. Nay, if they only wink at their faults, if they only forbear to reprove them for their Sins, and to acquaint them with the danger of continuing in them, they are careless of their Charge, and unfaithful to their Trust, and while they seem tender of giving Offence, do indeed give the greatest Offence; at once exposing their Sacred Office to contempt, and hazarding the Salvation of their own Souls. For so we are plainly told, *Ezek. xxxiii. 7. I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel, therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me: When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked man from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand.*

*1 Cor. ix. 22.*

Here (my Reverend Brethren) we see our Duty, and the strict Obligation that lies upon us to discharge it. And this is what we are to look to, to do our own Duty faithfully, and leave the issue and event of all to God,

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It may be that our boldness in the discharge of our Ministry, may prove a Prejudice to our worldly Interest, and many may account us *their Enemies*, and use us as such, only because we are their best Friends *in telling them the truth*; but there is no worldly Interest whatsoever so great as to be fit to stand in competition with the Interest of our own, and our Peoples Souls.

Or it may be, if we will not hold our peace; if we will needs be Preaching up unpopular Truths, and lashing the reigning Vices of the Age, some will take offence at our freedom, and (now especially that they are, as they think, at liberty to profess any Religion, or to be of none) will forsake our Assemblies, and either joyn themselves to some other Congregations, where they hope they shall hear more comfortable Doctrines, or perhaps will throw off at once all show and profession of Religion; But be it so, the fear or the probability of this, will not justify us in neglecting our own Duty, which is to *be instant in season, and out of season, and to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine*. This is the Direction that St. Paul gives to Timothy, and in him to all the Ministers of the Gospel; and that too, altho' he foresaw that the consequence of it would sometimes be, that such plain dealing would disoblige a great many, and make them forsake the Assemblies of the Faithful; for that he had this then in his mind, seems highly probable, from what he immediately adds in the very next words; *The time will come when they will not endure sound Doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth.*

2 Tim. iv. 2.

Verse 3.

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'Tis true indeed, we ought as the *Apostle* there directs, to rebuke and exhort *with all long-suffering; i. e.* to temper our reproofs with such Mildness and Gentleness, and Prudence, as that (if it be possible) we may give no offence to any. But if it be the truth it self that gives the offence, and not the imprudent manner of its delivery, our business is not to *please men* but GOD; and we must do our Duty, and speak the Words which he hath put into our Mouth, *and rebuke with all Authority*, not regarding what may be the consequence of it.

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We may think, perhaps, that in case our boldness in speaking the Truth, and reproving Vice, should drive away any from our Assemblies, (especially if they be Persons of Note and Authority in the place where they live) this would be to the disadvantage of our Church and Religion.

But no such matter; for of all those that separate from the Church upon such an account, we may truly say, as the *Apostle St. John* does of some Separatists in his time, *1 Epist. ii. 19.* *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.* Such are as much the Churches Enemies before their Separation, as they can be afterwards; and of the two, she had better have them open Enemies, than secret ones. But as for all such as are of honest Minds, and sincere and hearty in their Professions, they will like us the better for that for which the others dislike us; whereas on the contrary, if we should be afraid to do our Duty, if we should be meally-mouth'd, and not dare to speak the Truth for fear of the displeasure of such men, this



Serm. this would indeed be a great prejudice to our  
 IX. Cause, as giving just offence to the best men,  
 and too great occasion, *to such as desire occasion,*  
 to slight and despise our Office.

In fine; What we can be only afraid of in  
 this case, is no more than what our *Saviour* (*who*  
*knew what was in men*) certainly foreknew would  
 happen to himself; for he knew that the great-  
 est part of the Multitude that followed him, fol-  
 lowed him for the Loaves, and in hope to ad-  
 vance their Temporal Interest by early appear-  
 ing to be his Disciples; he knew consequently,  
 that upon his declaring the Truth to them, and  
 reproving them for their worldly-mindedness,  
 they would forsake his Company; but tho' he  
 foresaw this event, he would not be unfaithful  
 in his Office, or neglect that business for which  
 he came into the World, which was *to bear*  
*Witness unto the Truth*; he chose rather to have  
 but a few sincere Followers, than a great num-  
 ber of Hypocritical Professors; and therefore  
 would not dissemble the Truth, altho' he knew  
 that upon his declaring it, *many would go back,*  
*and walk no more with him.*

And now I proceed to the third Thing ob-  
 servable in the Text, *viz.*

III. The Question which our *Lord* (upon  
 the occasion of this great Desertion) puts to  
 those that still remained with him, *Jesus said*  
*unto the Twelve, Will ye also go away?*

And with what design this Question was  
 put, might have been doubted, if it had been  
 put by another; but it is certain, that our Sa-  
 viour did not put it to the *Twelve*, to know  
 their minds, for as the *Evangelist* says, *He knew*  
*all men, and needed not that any should testify of*  
*man, for he knew what was in man.* These

These words therefore, *Will ye also go away?* Sermon.  
are not so much a Question put to them, to IX.  
know whether they would stay or go, as an  
Option given them, a leaving it to their Will  
and Choice, whether they would do one or the  
other — as if he had said, — “ You see how  
“ many there are that have taken offence at my  
“ doctrine, and have upon that account all at  
“ once deserted me; but I am not at all con-  
“ cerned at their departure, for I desire no sub-  
“ jects but such as are willing to be so, and will be  
“ obedient to my words. If therefore you are  
“ of the same mind with them, if my doctrine  
“ does not relish with you, if your hearts ( as  
“ theirs ) are wholly set upon this World, and  
“ the interests of this Life, and you value not  
“ the having a Portion in my Spiritual King-  
“ dom, or dislike the Conditions of attaining it,  
“ ’tis to no purpose for you to stay any longer  
“ with me; for this is all the reward that I  
“ promise to my disciples: You are at your  
“ own liberty therefore to go or stay as you  
“ please; freely and willingly you gave up your  
“ selves at first to be my Disciples, and freely  
“ and willingly you shall continue so, or not at  
“ all; as I did not force you to follow me, so  
“ neither will I compel you to stay with me;  
“ Do what you think best for your selves; If  
“ you like the terms of my Discipleship, and  
“ think the reward that I propose, a sufficient  
“ encouragement, and are persuaded that I am  
“ able to make good what I promise, then stay  
“ with me; but if not, you also may follow the  
“ five thousand that are already gone away;  
“ I will not detain you against your minds.”  
*Will ye also go away?*

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From whence we may observe these Two Things.

1. That it is not agreeable to the *Nature* of the *Gospel* to force or compel men to the Profession of it.

If indeed Salvation were annexed to the outward Profession of *Christianity*, and every Visible Member of the *Church*, were also a Member of *Christ's* Spiritual Kingdom, it would be such a great deed of Charity to entitle Men to these benefits, as would be sufficient to compensate for any hardship that they were put to in order to it; and if Men were or could be forced to be saved, even altho it were by *Fire and Faggot*, they would have no more reason to cry out of Persecution, or to complain of any injury that was done them, than a man that was just ready to be drowned would have, if he that pull'd him out of the Water and saved his Life, should do it by the spraining of his Arm.

But the Case here is otherwise; for the Spiritual Kingdom of *Christ* is made up only of such as willingly submit to it; and though Force may make many Hypocrites, it cannot make one true *Christian*; for no outward force can compel the Will to consent, tho' it may compel the Mouth to speak, or the Body to act.

Not but that after all, it is most undoubtedly the Duty of *Christian Magistrates* to endeavour that all their Subjects may be brought both to the Profession and Belief of the *True Christian Faith*; and to this end they ought to set up, and establish in their Dominions the *True Christian Worship*, and to take care that their Subjects may be instructed in it; and also to give them



them all reasonable Encouragement in the Profession and Exercise of it.

Nay, I will not say that they may not, (for I am fully persuaded that they may) make use of the Sword wherewith GOD has entrusted them, for the correcting and restraining the Exorbitances of a misguided and ungovernable Zeal, and the Outrages of a mistaken Religion; and for the cutting off all of such workers of iniquity, as turn Religion into Rebellion, and Faith into Faction.

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But in what cases it is proper to make use of the Temporal Sword in Matters of Religion; what Temporal Encouragements are proper to be given to the Profession of the True Religion, and what Discouragements to Error and Schism, being Subjects needful to be enquired into only by them that have the Power of making or executing Laws, are not so proper to be discoursed of here.

But in general, That no man can, or ought to be compell'd to be a *Christian*, I think is very plain from our *Saviour's* Example: For tho' his Kingdom was Spiritual, *i. e.* tho he was pleased to use only Spiritual Means and Motives to engage Men to be his Disciples, he could have us'd other means if he had pleased; for as he himself tells us, *Mat. xxviii. 18. All power in heaven and earth was given unto him*; and therefore, if External Force and Compulsion had been a proper means to enlarge his Kingdom, and propagate his Religion, he would, doubtless, have made use of it; or at least have Commissioned and Impower'd his *Apostles* to use it; and not have only said to them (as he does in the words immediately following those aforecited) *go ye therefore, and teach*

Serm. *teach all nations*: He would not certainly (as  
 IX. he does in the Text) have left it to the Choice  
 and Option of his own Disciples, whether they  
 would continue in the Profession of his Religion  
 or no; *Will ye also go away?*

2. Another thing that may be observed from  
 hence, is this, That no License given, no *Tole-*  
*ration* granted, no Exemption from Temporal  
 Penalties in case of Separation allowed by men,  
 is sufficient to excuse from the guilt of Schism  
 those that separate from the *True Christian Church*  
 whereof they were Members, or to render their  
 Schism no Sin.

For what think you, if the Twelve *Apostles*,  
 upon this leave given them by *Christ*, had gone  
 back with the Five Thousand, would they not  
 by our *Saviour* himself (at the great day) have  
 been judged *Schismatics* or *Apostates* for their  
 so deserting him?

And yet (as Man) he gave them leave to  
 forsake him; he left it to their choice, whether  
 they would stay with him or no; he used no  
 Force or Compulsion to keep them against their  
 Wills; so that here was truly *Liberty of Consci-*  
*ence* granted them: They might be *Christians* if  
 they would; if not, they might return back to  
 the *Synagogue*, or go whither else they pleased:  
 Here were no worldly Motives offered to them  
 to induce them either to stay or to go, but the  
 whole matter was left to their own Conscience.

But notwithstanding this *Toleration*, (as it  
 may be called) it was most certainly their Du-  
 ty still to adhere to that Profession of *Christian-*  
*ity*, which they had taken upon themselves; and  
 if they had forsaken it, they would have been  
 guilty of a most inexcusable Sin before God.

And

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And the Case is the same now; Humane Lawgivers may give leave to their Subjects to be of any Religion, or to be of no Religion; but if they do, they can't make it lawful in it self, either to be *Atheists*, or to profess a false Religion, or to forsake the Communion of the *True Church*; for to believe a *GOD*, and to worship him Publickly, and to worship him in the Assemblies of the Faithful, are Duties that are laid upon us by a higher than any Human Authority; and therefore no Human Authority can discharge us from them.

The Law can take away and discharge us from no Obligation, but that which itself laid upon us; so that all the meaning of the largest and most unlimited Toleration that the Law can grant, is no more than this, *viz.* a Declaration that Men shall not be liable to any Temporal Mulcts or Penalties, or be any ways punish'd by the Civil Power, upon the account of any Differences in Religion, or for being of no Religion at all; but if antecedently to the Establishment of any *Church* by the *Civil Power*, and if antecedently to the enacting of any Penal Laws to oblige Men to hold its Communion, it was a Schism to separate without cause, from that *Christian Church* whereof we were Members, and such Schismatical Separation was a Sin before *GOD*, then so it will be still, notwithstanding any License or Toleration that can be granted by the Secular Power.

But now, That before any Civil Laws were enacted in favour of the *Church*, it was unlawful for any Man to separate from that *Church* whereof he was a Member, without cause; and  
 u that



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that such Separation rendered Men guilty of the Sin of Schism, and that Schism was a damnable Sin, is clearly evident from Holy Scripture.

For in the *Apostles* days, there was no Civil Establishment of any *Church*; all the Civil Powers then in being were either *Jewish* or *Heathen*, and *Judaism* or *Paganism* were the only establish'd Religions; and all Profession of the *Christian Religion* was strictly prohibited under the severest Penalties; but for all that, there was a *Christian Church* even in those days, with which all *Christians* were oblig'd to hold Communion, and from which it was a Sin to separate: *They continued stedfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship*, saith St. Luke, declaring the Practice of the first Converted *Christians*; *Acts* ii. 42. Even then it was a Sin to forsake the assembling themselves together, as you may see, *Heb.* x. 25. Even then it was a Duty to mark them that caused Divisions and Offences, contrary to the Doctrine which they had learned [from Christ and his Apostles] and to avoid them; *Rom.* xvi. 17. Even then Strifes and Divisions were Acts of Carnality, as we are told, *1 Cor.* iii. 3. and Heresie was then one of those Works of the Flesh, of which the Apostle says, That they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God, *Gal.* v. 20.

In a word; There was a *Christian Church* before there was any *Christian State*; and long before there were any Acts of Uniformity made, it was an *Apostolical Canon*, Let all things be done decently and in order; which oblig'd both the Bishops and Governours of the Church to ordain such Constitutions as were requisite for the decent and orderly Celebration of the Publick Worship,

*1 Cor.* xiv.  
40.

Worship, and the People to submit thereunto. From the very beginning of Christianity, it was a Duty incumbent on all Christians to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; and with one mind, and one mouth to glorifie God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: And it was always against the Nature and Constitution of the Christian Church, that there should be Divisions in it, or Separations from it.

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Eph. iv. 3.  
Rom. xv. 6.

Seeing therefore Church Communion is a Duty laid upon us by GOD; it plainly follows, That no Human Authority can release us from our Obligation to it; and consequently; that these words, *Will ye go away?* Or, *You may go away if you will*; by what man soever they are pronounced, cannot make it lawful for us to forsake the Assemblies of the Faithful, and to leave the Communion of that Christian Church in which we were baptiz'd, and of which we are Members, so long as the terms of her Communion are lawful.

And so much for the third thing. I proceed now to the Fourth and Last thing observable in the Text, viz.

IV. The honest and discreet Answer that was made by Simon Peter, in the Name of himself, and the other Apostles, when this Option was put to them. *Will ye also go away?* says our Saviour; Lord, says he, *to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*

From whence we may briefly observe these three things,

1. That 'tis indispensibly necessary to be of some Church or other; this is clearly intimated in the Apostle's Answer, Lord, *to whom shall we go?* He takes it for granted, as a matter of

Serm. which there could be no reasonable doubt, that  
 IX. in case they had left our *Lord*, they must have  
 betaken themselves to some other guide; and  
 that if they had forsaken his Communion, they  
 must have gone over to some other Commu-  
 nion; he supposes it as a most evident and un-  
 deniable Truth (as indeed it is) That it is not  
 enough for a man *to have Faith to himself*, to  
 adore God only in his heart, or to Worship  
 him only in his Closet; but that it is also necessa-  
 ry to make a publick Profession of that Religion  
 which he is of, and to hold Communion with  
 others of the same Faith and Profession, in the  
 Common Acts of Worship and Devotion. And  
 this is a point very needful, and well worthy  
 to be consider'd by a great many that now-a-  
 days do forsake our Churches, not to go to a-  
 ny other Religious Assemblies, but to spend  
 their time in sleeping or dozing at home, or  
 in tipling at the Ale-house. If we go from  
 thee, *to whom shall we go?*

2. Therefore, what may be further observ'd  
 from hence is this, That seeing it is necessary  
 to be of some *Church* or other, it is highly un-  
 reasonable to separate from the *Church* where-  
 of we are Members, till we have found out a  
 better *Church* to joyn our selves to.

Quite contrary to which is the practice of  
 many *Separatists*, who first desert their own  
*Church*, while as yet they are to seek what  
 Religion to be of, and what *Church* to go to;  
 they first throw off, upon some foolish disgust  
 or fanciful dislike, the Religion they were bred  
 up in, and then under a pretence that they are  
 making enquiry which is the best Religion,  
 spend all the rest of their Lives without any  
 Religion at all.



It is indeed St. Paul's Direction, 1 Theff. v. 21. That we should *prove all things*; and this is a Text often cited by these men in justification of themselves; and they value themselves at no small rate, for their having (as they think) the Scripture itself on their side.

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But they should do well to read the whole Verse throughout, and then they would see clearly how little this Text makes for them: *Prove all things, saith the Apostle, and then he immediately adds, and hold fast that which is good.* The meaning of which last Clause is at least thus much; That when we are satisfy'd of the goodness of our own way, we should stick to it, and hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering; it being then both unreasonable and endless to make further trials.

But suppose we are not fully satisfy'd in this point; suppose we have some little Doubts and Scruples in our minds, whether that Religion and way of Worship that we have been bred up in, be the best or no? do they think that the *Apostle* would have us be of all Religions one after another, that so at last we may be able to judge which is best? This would be just as if a Man in his Journey meeting with several cross ways, should go a little in one, and a little in another, and a little in a third, and so on; the certain consequence of which would be, that having spent his whole day in making these trials of the several ways that presented themselves, he would be no nearer his Journeys end at Night, than he was in the Morning.

Or do they think that he would have us be of no Religion, till we had first carefully exam-

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min'd into the Grounds and Reasons of all; this would be every whit as ill as the other: For there are very few that by their Parts and Learning are qualify'd to undertake, and fewer yet (if any at all) that have leisure enough from the necessary avocations of Life, to go through with such a difficult and tedious Work as this would be; so that for a Man to take this method, would be just as if the travelling-man before spoken of, meeting with several cross ways, should spend his whole day in sitting still and considering which of them to chuse, but should go in none of them; how should he ever come to his Journeys end?

But the course that a wise man in such a case would take, is this; If he were left wholly to himself to judge, he would according to the best of his skill, and as the time and exigence would permit, chuse that Road which appear'd to him to be the right; or if he had a Guide with him, on whose skill and judgment he might with prudence rely, rather than on his own, he would take that way which he directed him to; and when he was once entred into it, he would go on steadily in it, never stopping or staying in the least, unless by some evident Tokens he should be clearly convinc'd that he was in the wrong; and never leaving that way for another, unless he were fully assur'd that the other was much better: A man that takes this course may arrive to the place whither he designs, which it is certain neither of the other can do: Or if after all he should be in a mistake, yet having done his best, and taken the prudentest method that he could, his mistake would be pitiable and pardonable.

And

And I dare be bold to say, That that man, Serm. IX.  
 who according to the best of his knowledge,  
 serves GOD faithfully, and worships him with  
 a sincere and devout heart, although in a mi-  
 staken way, shall find more favour with GOD,  
 and fare better in the other World, than he  
 that is *ever learning, but is never able to come to*  
*the knowledge of the truth*; or who under a pre-  
 tence that he is quite at a loss, and in a great  
 uncertainty, in what way GOD would be wor-  
 shipped, passes his days without making pro-  
 fession of any Religion, and never worships  
 GOD at all.

And therefore before we leave that way  
 which we have been bred up, and educated  
 in, we should be fully convinc'd that we are  
 in an error, and fix upon some other way to  
 take, and be certainly assur'd that the way we  
 take, is better than that we leave. *Lord, to*  
*whom shall we go?* "We know not whither  
 "else to go, and therefore why should we  
 "go from thee. But,

3. And lastly. Another thing that may be  
 observ'd from this Answer of the Apostle's is  
 this: That there can be no sufficient reason to  
 separate from a Church, which has the words  
 of eternal life: *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou*  
*hast the words of eternal life.* As if he had said,

"We know that thou art true, and teachest Matth. xxiii  
 "the way of GOD in truth: We are sure that 16.  
 "we are safe in following thee; so that should  
 "we forsake thee, and follow another, 'tis  
 "impossible we should get by the change: On  
 "a worse Guide we may easily happen, but a  
 "better we cannot have: *To whom then shall*  
 "we go, if we go from thee? or upon what



Serm. " account should we leave thee for any other,  
IX. " seeing thou hast the words of eternal life?

And this is a Point that many of our *Dissenting Brethren* would do well to consider seriously of; What reason they have to forsake the Communion of the *Establish'd Church*.

Some, perhaps, will say, That the Terms of her Communion are unlawful, and that they can't with a good Conscience join in her Worship. Now whether or no they say true in this, *GOD* will judge; but if they do speak the truth, and are really persuaded, as they say, here is a reasonable Plea for Separation.

But the far greatest part of those that separate from the *Church*, do not pretend this; They think our Worship lawful, and *occasionally* (especially to qualifie themselves for an Office) they can and do join in it; and her Doctrine they likewise own to be true and agreeable to the Scriptures. They grant there is nothing necessary to Salvation wanting in our *Church*, and nothing destructive to Salvation enjoyn'd: Nay, they say farther, (and that they think will fully justifie them from the charge of Schism) that the Congregations which they joyn themselves to, and do ordinarily communicate with, own the same Scriptures, profess the same *Creed*, worship the same *GOD*, and are in all respects of the same Religion that we are of.

But if it be so, then why do they go from us? If they believe that we *have the words of eternal life*, what need they go elsewhere? what can they hope for more in the Communion of any other Church, than they might have in their own? If they are really of the

same

same Religion with us, why do they break our Communion? why do they make a rent and a Schism in the *Church* for nothing?

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They indeed that forsake a Corrupt *Church*, or an Idolatrous Worship; they that leave the Communion of a *Church*, in which they think they could not be sav'd, act prudently and wisely; but to forsake a *Church*, and at the same time to profess that they are still of the same Religion with that *Church* which they have forsaken, is a practise which I think no account can be given of. This is certainly to break the Unity of the *Church* for nothing, and needlessly to make a Rent and a Schism in the *Body of Christ*; and that very thing which they plead in excuse for their Schism, does to my apprehension render it altogether inexcusable; For if ever Schism be a sin, it is certainly so, when there is no cause for it; and there can be no just cause to leave that *Church* which we were bred in, and are Members of, and to go over to another which professes the same Faith, teaches the same Doctrines, and agrees in all the Essentials of Worship with that *Church* which we leave. For why should a man leave the *Establisht Church*, and go to another, or set up another against it, when by his own confession he does not mend himself by the change, but might have been sav'd as well in that *Church* which he leaves, as in that which he goes to?

But I know it is pleaded by this sort of *Separatists*, That though they agree with us in the Substantials of Religion, they differ from us in the Circumstantials, and therefore go for the most part to other Religious Assemblies, because

Serm. because there they think God is worshipped af-

IX. ter a purer manner than he is amongst us;

That tho' there be in the *Establish'd Church* all things necessary to Salvation, and she has the words of eternal life; yet she has also some unnecessary Observances, some Rites and Ceremonies which they think might be better omitted, and which are not used in those Religious Meetings which they join themselves to.

But to this the Answer is easie: Either these Circumstantials of our Worship, these Rites and Ceremonies are lawful to be used, or not; now if they be not lawful to be us'd; if (for instance) it be unlawful to be present at, and to join in those Prayers which the Minister puts up while he is clothed with a white Garment; or if it be unlawful to receive the Sacrament upon the Knee, why do they ever do these things at all? why do they do that to qualifie themselves for an Office, which if it be a sin, they ought not to do to gain the whole world? But if these things be lawful, and the only thing they have to say against them, is, that they are in their opinion needless and superfluous Observances; what a small reason is this to make a Schism and Division in the Church? There can be no end of Separations and Divisions if they may be justify'd by such fanfiful dislikes as these; for the Fancies of Men are so infinitely different as to such things, that 'tis impossible that the same should please all people; so that either Church-Communion is no duty, or else such dislikes of the Fancy only cannot be a sufficient ground of a Separation; for there is no Congregation where the Minister is not

cloathed with some Garment or other, and

where for



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where the *Sacrament* is not receiv'd in some posture or other; and there is no Garment or posture, which some may not have a fancy against, as well as against these, and with as good reason. Nay, not only the Fancies of divers men, but even of the same men at divers times, are so very different as to such things, that what they like one day, they oftentimes dislike as much the next; so that he who goes from a Pure and Orthodox *Church* upon such trivial accounts, cannot tell himself whither he shall go at last; but it is most probable, that if he goes on thus indulging his Fancy, he will be one day of this *Seet*, another of another, and a third of a third; till at last having try'd all *Seets*, and found in every one something that he disliked, he will come to be of no Religion at all. Or if not so; yet 'tis highly probable, that while he thus busies himself about the Ceremonies and Circumstantials of Religion, he will neglect the substance of it, and omit the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith, without which all his zeal for the external Purity of the Divine Worship will avail him nothing.

Thus having, as briefly as I could, run thro' all those Particulars which the Text offer'd to our meditation; I proceed in a few words to apply what hath been said; and indeed the Application is so easie, that I shall not need to be long in it.

For as it happen'd to our Saviour in the 1st Verse of the Text, so it hath happen'd to this *Church* whereof we are Members; many that formerly joyn'd in her Communion, and seem'd as hearty and zealous in it as any, have of late forsaken her.

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I will not make the Application so near, as to say that they then follow'd her for the Loaves, and for their temporal Interest, though their leaving her just at this time, might well enough make that be suspected; neither will I say that the true reason of their leaving her, is, because her Doctrine is too pure, and too good for them.

But whatever was the motive of their Separation, 'tis matter of fact that there are many now gone away (tho' GOD be thanked not near so many, as it was bragg'd there would be, if ever a Toleration were granted) *many there are that are gone back, and will now walk no more with us.*

But the number of *Separatists* from any Church is not (as I have shew'd) a just Objection against it; neither ought it to be any inducement to others to follow their Example; for what hath now happen'd to our Church, is not near so much as befel our Lord himself, who had five thousand *Disciples* that deserted him at once, while only *twelve* remain'd with him.

And what he said to them, I may say to you that still continue in our Communion; If you are dispos'd to follow the Example that these have set you, you have now free liberty to do it: You also may go away if you please; there is no restraint now laid upon you by the Laws; the whole matter is between GOD and your selves.

But nevertheless, let me tell you, you are still as much oblig'd in conscience to hold communion with us, as ever you were; and if we have the *words of eternal life*; if the Doctrine which we profess and teach, be pure and orthodox;

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dox; if the Holy Sacraments are duly and rightly administred among us; and if our Worship be such as you may lawfully join in; here is no just ground for a Separation; and if you separate without just ground from the *Established Church*, in which you were born and bred, and with which you ought to hold communion in sacred things, you rend the Body of *Christ*, and are *Schismatics* before *GOD*, altho' you are not guilty of any *State-crime*, nor incur any legal Penalties.

Consider well then what you do; If we have the words of eternal life, why should you leave us? what can you hope for more in any other Communion?

Consider at least, before you go away from us, whither you will go when you have left us; and forsake not this *Church*, till you are sure you have found out a better, to join your selves to.

It was very reasonably put by *Joshua* to the Children of *Israel*, *Josh. xxiv. 15.* *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods that your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell:* And 'tis no less reasonable in this case. Some Religion you must be of, or else you can have no hope of Salvation; and whatsoever Religion you are of, it must needs be your duty to make a publick profession of it; so that if you forsake the *Establish'd Church*, you must go to some other; Chuse you then, before you forsake the Religion and Communion that you were brought up in, (chuse you, I say) what Religion you will be of, what Communion you will adhere to.

Will



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Will you return back again into *Egypt*; or (in the words of *Joshua*) will you serve the gods that your fathers served, that were on the other side of the floud? I mean, will you go over to the Church of Rome? i. e. will you go to a Church that has most notoriously corrupted the Faith of Christ? To a Church that takes away the key of knowledge from her people, not suffering them to look into the Holy Scriptures, which are the Oracles of God, and the words of life? To a Church that has enlarg'd her Creed to double that of the Apostles; and enjoins as necessary to Salvation, the belief not only of the greatest Falsties, but of the most evident Contradictions? To a Church, whose publick Service is not understood by her Members, and which makes her Children, say, *Amen*, to they know not what? In fine; Will you go to that Church, whose Worship and Service you cannot join in, without being guilty of Idolatry?

What is there in this Church that can charm or tempt you to her Communion, unless perhaps it be the very easie terms on which she promises you Salvation?

And this indeed is a reasonable Inducement to such as would fain go to Heaven, and yet are resolv'd not to part with their beloved Sins; But in a matter of such great Importance to us, as this is, 'tis good to go upon sure grounds, and not to try an experiment, that if it fails, will be fatal to us.

Now, that Faith and Obedience will carry us to Heaven, is agreed on all hands; and the Scripture itself plainly assures us; but that any thing less will do it, we have no good ground to believe. And particularly, That Confession, with

with the Priest's Absolution, will do as well as a Holy Life ; That those that want Good Works of their own, may for Money, or by some slight Penances, purchase as much as they want, of those who abound in merit : And that they who take little or no care of themselves while they live, may have sufficient care taken of them by their Friends when they are dead ; these are very comfortable Doctrines indeed, but they are no where taught in Scripture, nor grounded upon Reason ; they are Doctrines, for the truth of which we have only their word, whose gain in teaching them is so evident, as may justly render their Testimony suspected.

But without entring upon a particular Examination of them ; this one thing alone is a sufficient prejudice against all such easie Methods of Salvation, by whomsoever propos'd ; That they are cleary contrary to that Account which our *Blessed Saviour*, who is *Truth* itself, hath given us of the way to Heaven ; and to that advice which he grounds thereupon, in *Matth. vii. 13, 14.* *Enter ye in at the strait gate ; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat ; Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

Well then ; If you will not go over to the Church of Rome ; whither is it that you'll go when you leave us ? Will you go and join yourselves to any of the *Separate Assemblies* here at home ? But if so, *To which of them will ye go ?* For here is such variety of ways at once offer'd to you, as is enough perfectly to confound and distract you. I

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IX

I have not time now to tell you how many several *Seets* there are of Dissenters from the *Church*, and much less to give you a just and compleat Character of them; that you may consider which of them to chuse; but in general they may be reduc'd to these Four Sorts.

1. Some of these *Seets* there are, that have either no Creed, or no Sacraments, or no Orders; or no Rule to guide them by, but the Light within them; *Will ye go to any of these?* But if you do, can you tell what Religion you shall be of, or whether you shall be of any at all?

2. Others of them there are, that positively deny the most Fundamental Articles of the *Christian Faith*, as the Doctrine of the Ever Blessed *Trinity*, the Incarnation of the *Son of God*, the Satisfaction of our *Saviour*, and the like; *Will ye go to them?* But if you do, this is to add Heresie to your Schism, and to multiply your Iniquity.

3. Others again there are that teach such Doctrines, as either directly, or in their immediate consequences, give too great Encouragement to Vice, by rendring a good Life unnecessary; But I hope I have already mention'd a sufficient prejudice against all such easie Religions, so that you will not so much as once think of going to them.

4. Lastly, Others there are that profess the same Faith with the *Church*, and are (as they themselves say) of the same Religion that we are of; and differ from us only in some External Modes and Rites of Worship. Will you go over to these?

But



But why should you make a Schism in the Church for nothing; Only because her Rites and Ceremonies are not exactly suited to your fancy? Why should you break the Unity of that Church whereof you are Members, and with which you agree in all the Essentials of Doctrine and Worship, only for the sake of two or three harmless Ceremonies? Which she uses indeed in her Publick Worship for Decency and Order sake; but which she enjoins not as any parts of Religion, or as things necessary in themselves, and which being no where forbidden in Scripture, cannot, to be sure, be unlawful to be used; for *where there is no law, there is no transgression.* Rom. iv. 15.

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If then the *Sett* you design to go to, be of the same Religion with the Church that you leave, why should you leave her, seeing by your own Confession, she has the *words of eternal life*, as well as they? And if she has, to what purpose should you go elsewhere?

Is it (first) for better Prayers that you go thither? That can hardly be; However, 'tis what you can't be sure of, not knowing what their Prayers will be, till you have heard them.

Our Prayers indeed are known what they are; they are free to be read and examined by all: You may (if you will) satisfy your selves before you join in them, that they are directed to the right Object of our Worship; that they are composed of such Petitions as are proper to be put up in Publick; and that they are grave and serious, and fitted to excite Devotion; whereas, if you go to the Separate Assemblies, you know not what God you shall worship, at least you know not with what you shall

Serm. serve G O D till you come thither ; you are much  
IX. like a Man that Subscribes a Paper or Petition  
to his Prince without reading it.

Or (secondly) is it for better Preaching that you go thither ? That's e'ne as it happens, and you may as easily be disappointed in this, as in the other case.

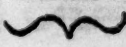
And, without magnifying our selves too much, this I'm sure I may safely say, That many that have gone from their own *Church*, to a Separate Assembly, to hear a better Sermon, have heard a worse.

But however that be, so long as the Doctrine that is Preached in both places, is the same, (as you grant it is) there cannot be so much difference in the Words and Phrases wherein it is expressed, or in the manner of its delivery, as will serve to justify a Schism.

And besides, what the *Apostle* says, is most undoubtedly true, *Paul may plant, and Apollo may water, but it is God that giveth the increase* : If the Seeds be both of the same Intrinsick Goodness (as is now supposed) one may be more beautiful to the Eye than the other, but the only things on which their fruitfulness will depend, are the Goodness of the Soil they are sown in, and the Blessing of Heaven ; And the Grace of G O D, who is the G O D of Peace and Order, may, I'm sure, be much more reasonably expected by those that keep the Unity of the *Church*, and are regular and orderly in their Stations, than by such as separate from the *Established Church*, whereof they are Members, only to gratify their *itching ears*.

In a word ; So long as our Prayers are good, although it were supposed that they are not the

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the best; and so long as our Preaching is sound and Orthodox, although it be not altogether so taking as some other Mens may be; and so long as the terms of our Communion are lawful, there can be no reason that can justify your leaving us. For whither can you go to mend your selves? or why should you go away from us at all, seeing we have *the words of eternal life*?

I Conclude all therefore with those Words of the *Apostle*, 1 Cor. i. 10. *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing; and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

Which GOD of his great Mercy grant we may all be, for the sake of our *Lord Jesus Christ*; To whom, with the *Father* and the *Holy Ghost*, be all Honour, and Glory, now and for ever.  
*Amen.*

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Sermon

LXX

the best; and so long as our preaching is sound  
and Orthodox, although it be not altogether so  
taking as some other men may be; and so long  
as the terms of our Communion are lawful, there  
can be no reason that can justify your leaving us,  
for whether can you go to toward your selves?  
or why should you go away from us at all,  
leaving we have the word of eternal life?

I conclude all therefore with those Words  
of the Apostle 1 Cor. ii. 14. Now I bless you  
because by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ  
that ye all speak the same thing; and that there  
be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly  
joined together in the same mind, and in the same  
judgment.

Which God of his great Mercy grant we  
may all be, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ;  
To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost,  
be all Honour, and Glory, now and for ever.

God's

X

# GOD's Design in Afflicting Good Men.



## A S E R M O N,

Preach'd before the HOUSE OF  
COMMONS, at St. Marg. Westm.  
January 30<sup>th</sup> 1698.

St. JOHN IX. 3.

*Jesus answered, Neither hath this Man sinned nor his Parents; but that the Works of God should be made manifest in him.*

**T**HE Occasion of these Words may be seen in the foregoing Verses: As Jesus passed by, he saw a Man which was blind from his Birth; And his Disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this Man, or his Parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath, &c.

For the right Understanding of which Answer of our Saviour's, we must first inquire into the Ground and Meaning of the Disciples

Serm.  
m. 32

Question; Master, who did sin, this Man, or his Parents, that he was born blind?

And the Ground and Reason of their Question seems to be an Opinion which they had entertained, That the good and evil Things of this Life were by the Divine Providence, always proportioned to Men according to their different Deserts; and particularly, that whenever God sent upon any Man any sore and extraordinary Affliction, some great Offence or extraordinary Provocation was always the Reason of it.

And this indeed is an Opinion that is too generally received in the World, and is the Occasion of those rash and uncharitable Censures, which People are too apt to pass upon others, from the Consideration of the evil Things which they see do befall them in this Life.

They can hardly forbear thinking that Man, a great Sinner, whom they see very sorely afflicted, although they themselves know nothing that he has done amiss; nor perhaps ever heard any thing ill of him: But the Judgment of God, they presume, is right; and they take it for granted, that he would not have inflicted such Punishment upon any Man, if he had not well deserved it.

So the Inhabitants of the Island on which St. Paul was Shipwreck'd argued, with respect to him, when a Viper out of the Fire had fastned on him; *Act xxviii. 4.* When the Barbarians saw the venomous Beast hang on his Hand, they said among themselves, no doubt this Man is a Murderer, whom, tho' he hath escaped the Sea, yet Vengeance suffereth not to live.

And



And thus also the Disciples seem to have thought, viz. That such a great Calamity as Blindness, would not have been sent upon any Man, but for some very great Fault; tho' what the Fault was, or where the Fault lay, they could not guess. Serm. X.

Had the Man been suddenly struck with Blindness, they would have made no doubt but that it was a Judgment of GOD upon him, for some great Crime that he himself had committed; altho' they had not been able to name the particular.

But his Case was extraordinary, for he was born Blind; so that the Calamity was sent upon him before he could have done any Thing to deserve it; And so what Account to give of this, they could not tell.

But they seem to have heard of the Opinion of the *Pythagoreans* (which was embraced also by some among the *Jews*) who held that there is a Transmigration of Souls from one Body to another; so that consequently, every Man that is born into the World, had a Pre-existence in some former State. And if this Opinion were true, they could not tell, but that this Man's Blindness from his Birth, might be a punishment sent upon him by GOD, for his Mis-behaviour in that former State which he was in. Gret. in Loc.

Or if not so; yet they remembered, that it was threatned in their own Law, that GOD would sometimes visit the Sins of the Fathers upon their Children. And so they could not tell but that that this Blindness of the Child was designed as a Punishment to his wicked Parents.

Serm. and that the Sin of the Father or Mother was,  
 X. hereby, visited on their Son.

One or t'other of these, they took for granted, was the Cause of this Man's Blindness; viz. that it was a Judgment of GOD upon him either for the Wickedness of his Parents; or else, for some great Crime committed by himself, in some State that his Soul had formerly been in, before it was united to this Body: And therefore they came to our Saviour to be resolved which of them it was, Master, say they, *Who did sin, this Man, or his Parents, that he was born blind?*

In Answer to which Question, our Saviour, wisely avoiding to satisfy their Curiosity in a Point that it was needless for them to know; viz. Whether the Soul has any Existence, or is capable of contracting any Guilt, before it comes into the Body; tells them that they had misstated the Case; that the Question should not have been, Whether this Man's Blindness was a Judgment or Punishment inflicted on him, for his own, or for his Parents Sin: But whether it was at all designed for a Punishment of Sin; Or, whether it was inflicted for some other Cause; for that the Temporal Evils that befall Men, are not always for Punishment, but are sometimes designed for quite other Purposes; And that this last was the Case of the Man they had asked about. *Jesus answered, neither hath this Man sinned nor his Parents; that is, it is not any extraordinary Wickedness, either in this Man, or his Parents, that was the Reason of his Blindness; but it was, that the Works of God should be made manifest in him.*

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The meaning of which last Clause, as spoken with a particular respect to the Blind Man, I take to be this; That he was therefore born blind, to give Occasion to our *Saviour* to exert and manifest his Power, in the miraculous Cure of such a Defect, or Imperfection in the Body of this Man, as by any natural Means or Remedies that could be used, was altogether incurable; and thereby to give an undeniable Proof, that he was endued with a divine Power, and consequently that he was the *Messiah*. He was therefore born blind, that the Power of our *Saviour* should be manifested in him.

But as the Words may be generally understood, and applied to any other Case of the like Nature, the Meaning is this; That when any Temporal Evil or Affliction befalls any Man, which is not designed for a Punishment of his Sin, and to make him an Example of the divine Vengeance: it is not however by any Oversight or Carelessness of Providence that he is so afflicted; But that there is always some other good and wise End of Providence designed to be served by it. *Neither hath this Man sinned, nor his Parents*; that is, they have not either of them so sinned, as that he should be born blind, for a Punishment of his own or their Sin; but he was therefore born blind, that the Works of God should be made manifest in him.

From the Words thus explained, I shall take Occasion, very briefly, to do these Two Things.

I. To shew that the Temporal Evils which befall Men, are not always inflicted upon them as Punishments for Sin.

II. To



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X.



II. To shew what other wise Ends of Providence, the Temporal Evils and Afflictions that befall good Men, do serve for.

I. I shall shew that the Temporal Evils which befall Men, are not always inflicted upon them as Punishments for Sin. *Neither hath this Man sinned, nor his Parents, that he should be born blind; says our Saviour.*

And what was true in his Case, is undoubtedly true in a great many others; And the Holy Scripture it self furnishes us with several Examples of this kind. But that of *Job* being one of the most remarkable ones, I shall at present Instance only in that.

Where, first of all, we may take notice of the Character that is given of him, by the Holy Spirit of God; *Job i. 1. That Man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed Evil.* So far was he from being a greater Sinner than others, that, on the contrary, there was none upon Earth, at that time, so good as he. *Hast thou,* says God himself, *considered my Servant Job, that there is none like him in the Earth?* *Job i. 8.* Certainly then, if any Man could ever merit to be exempted, even from the common Miseries and Calamities of Humane Life, it was he. And yet it pleased God to order it quite otherwise; And in him that Observation of the Wise Man was strictly verified, *That there be Just Men, unto whom it happeneth according to the Work of the Wicked.*

Ecc. viii. 14.

For, if in the next place, we take notice of the Afflictions which befall this good Man; I believe we may truly say, that there is no Example of any, the greatest Sinner that e-

ver

ver lived, that was so hardly dealt by, as he was. Serm. X.

Sometimes, indeed, a mighty Oppressor is forced to disgorge his ill gotten Wealth, and is on a sudden, from the greatest Plenty, reduced to the most Miserable Want. Sometimes again, a notorious Sinner, who escapes in his own Person, is very severely punished in his Children; and has his Punishment multiplied, by enduring, in the Misery of every one of them, whom he loves as himself, as much Pain and Torment, as he would do, if the Calamity that befel them had befallen himself. And again, The Punishments that are inflicted upon Men in this Life, by the divine Providence, are commonly single, either miserable Want and Poverty, or some painful Sickness, or noisom Disease, or perhaps a violent or untimely Death. And when any of these Evils befalls any Man, we can scarcely forbear crying out, A Judgment! A Judgment! Surely this Man was a great Sinner, or else he would not have been so afflicted!

What then should we have thought of a Man, in whom all these Miseries and Afflictions were united, as they were in Job? *Who was, one Day, the greatest of all the Men of the East, having seven thousand Sheep, and three thousand Camels, and five hundred Yoke of Oxen, and five hundred she-Ases, and a very great House-hold; and the next day was bereft of all his Substance, and left as naked as he came out of his Mothers Womb; who was, one Day, blessed with ten hopeful Children, who were very obedient to their Father, and very loving to one another; and the next Day, was deprived of them all at once, and that too, by a violent Death, by the Fall* Job i. 3:  
Ver. 21:  
Ver. 2, 4, 5:  
Ver. 19:  
of

**Serm.** of an House upon their Heads. And it added not a little to the Greatness of these Afflictions, that they came all upon him suddenly, when no such Evils were foreseen, or could reasonably be feared; and that they happened all at the same time, the Messenger of one ill piece of News, having scarcely told his Tale, before he was succeeded by another, the Messenger of a worse.

**Ver.** 16, 17, 18.

**Chap.** ii. 6.

**Ver.** 6, 7.

But hitherto he had suffered only in his Estate, and in his Children; but it was not long before he was brought to suffer likewise in his own Person; and that too in the worst Manner that the Devil himself could devise; in such a Manner, as perhaps no other Man either before or since hath ever suffered; being smitten all over with sore Boils, from the sole of his Foot unto his Crown, so that he had not one sound Part in his whole Body.

**Job.** iv. 7, &c.  
**viii.** 3, 4. **xi.** 6.

And who would not have thought this Evil, especially when added to all the others aforementioned, a sufficient indication of God's high Displeasure against him? Who that had seen such a miserable Object, as he then was, would not have concluded, as his Friends then did, that all these Calamities were certain Expressions and sure Tokens of God's severest Vengeance upon him, for some great and crying sins, well known to God, although concealed from the World?

**Job.** ii. 6.

'Tis true indeed, all this while his own Life was spared; the Devil had no Permission from God to touch that; and he was not as some notorious Sinners sometimes are, taken off by an untimely Death. But his Affliction was not the less, but much the greater for this. For though



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though an untimely Death, to such as live in Ease, and Plenty, and Prosperity, and Sin, may be justly reckon'd a Misfortune; yet most certainly, to such as are good Men, and yet are in extreme Want, or Pain, or Misery, it is a great Happiness to be deliver'd out of their sad and wretched state, tho' it be by Death. And so this good Man thought it would have been to him, and therefore, as patient as he was, could not forbear cursing the Day wherein he was born to endure such Misery, and heartily wishing for Death to put an End to it; *Wherefore, says he, is Light given to him that is in Misery, and Life unto the bitter in Soul? Which long for Death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid Treasures? Which rejoyce exceedingly, and are glad when they can find the Grave? Job iii. 20, 21, 22.*

Thus you see, that all those Miseries and Calamities of Life, which when they singly befall Men, are sometimes Acts and Expressions of the divine Vengeance upon them, for some great and crying Sins, did all together befall this good Man; of whom yet, in the midst of his Calamity, GOD himself gives this excellent Character, *Job ii. 3. And the Lord said unto Satan, hast thou considered my Servant Job, that there is none like him in the Earth, a perfect and an upright Man, one that feareth God and escheweth Evil? And still he holdeth fast his Integrity, altho' thou movest me against him, to destroy him without a Cause.*

And this one Example alone, is, I think a sufficient Proof of the first Point I was to speak to; which was to show that the temporal Evils which befall Men, are not always inflicted upon them as Punishments for Sin. But

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But the Day we are here met together upon, may likewise furnish us with another great Example of it, in our late gracious Sovereign King CHARLES I. And we should be injurious to his Memory, if we should not, now at this time, briefly reflect thereupon. Of whom we may say, as was said of *Job*, That *he was a perfect and upright Man, One that feared God and eschewed Evil*; for even his greatest Enemies, his wicked Murtherers, could not charge him with any Vice or Immorality; or even with any Frailty or Infirmary, but such as might be consistent with Integrity of Heart and Mind; And of whom, if we consider him as a King, we may, I think, truly say, (for what Profit can there be in flattering the Dead? especially One, whom a great many now adays make it their Business; and, I suppose, hope to find their Interest in it, to blacken and defame?) as was said of good King *Josiah*; *Like unto him, was there no King before him: May there after him, arise many like him.*

2 King. xxiii.  
25.

A King, that could not by the softness of his Education, nor by the Ease and Plenty of a Court, nor by the many bad Examples that were ever before his Eyes, of those who had greater Restraints upon them than he had, be tempted to any Luxury, or Excess, or Extravagance in his way of Living.

A King, whom the Pleasures of Sense (of which he had, or might have had as great a share as any) could not make in love with Pleasure, or fond of this World; and whom the Multitude of Cares and Business that attend a Crown could not make to neglect or omit his constant Exercise of Devotion.

A

A King, that naturally car'd for his Subjects, and pity'd them as as a Father does his Children; that readily condescended to any thing that he thought was for their Good; and would have granted more than he did to them, if he could have done it, without betraying the Rights of the Crown, wherewith he was entrusted; and (which he valued more,) the Interest of Religion. And indeed rather than do either of these, he was contented to lose, not only his Crown from off his Head, but his Head too.

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Such was the Saint of the Day, whose Memory we now celebrate, and whose Death we lament. A Sinner indeed we can't deny him to be, in the same Sense in which the Scripture says, that all Men are Sinners; and that *there is not a just Man upon Earth, that doeth Good, and sinneth not*; But excepting only the Weaknesses of Humane Nature, and such slips and infirmities as the best Men are liable to; we may truly say of him, as was likewise said of *Josiah*, that *He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord,——and turned not aside to the right Hand, or to the left.*

Rom. iii. 23.

Eccl. vii. 20.

2 Kings xxii.

2.

And yet to this just Man it hapned according to the Work of the Wicked; or rather, much worse. For tho' there have been many cruel Tyrants, and bloody Persecutors, and Monsters of Wickedness, which have been made Examples to the World of the divine Vengeance; yet hardly hath it hapned even to the worst of them, so ill, as it did to this, the best of Kings, and the best of Men.

They have indeed, some of them, been over-power'd by some neighbouring Prince, displaced



Serm. ced from their Government, and driven into  
 X. Exile; And they have, others of them, been  
 ~~~~~ risen up against by their own oppress'd Sub-  
 jects, and either slain in Battel, or else, being
 overcome, they have been depos'd from their
 Kingly Power, shut up in Prison, and secretly
 Murther'd; the just and wise Providence of
 GOD so permitting it to be: But in all Hi-
 story, I believe there is no Example parallel
 to this in every Respect, scarcely any like it;
 That a Sovereign King, even while he was
 own'd a King, should have an Army of his
 Subjects levy'd in his Name, and, as 'twas pre-
 tended, by his Authority, against his Person;
 That they that endeavour'd to depose and kill
 him, should yet give out that they were fight-
 ing for him; And that, when they had got
 him into their Power, they should set up a
 Court of Judicature upon him, compos'd out
 of his own Subjects, who had sworn Allegi-
 ance to him; That there they should formally
 Arraign and Try him against whom only Trea-
 son could be committed, for the Crime of
 High Treason; And that at last they should
 proceed so far in their Hypocritical Impiety,
 as to pass Sentence of Death on him, from
 whom only the Judges of Life and Death could
 legally derive their Power; and to Execute,
 as a Villanous Malefactor, the Father of their
 Country, their rightful Lord and Sovereign.

The Evils that he suffer'd, consider'd in
 themselves, were as great as could well be en-
 dur'd; but the Manner in which they were
 inflicted, and the Persons from whom he suf-
 fer'd them, were highly aggravating Ingredi-
 ents in his Affliction; so that all things consi-
 der'd,

der'd, perhaps no Man (our Lord and Saviour only excepted) did ever suffer more.

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And now from these two great and notable Examples, I hope, we are sufficiently convinced, that the temporal Afflictions which befall Men, are not always certain Tokens of G O D's Displeasure; nor always design'd for the Punishment of their Sin upon whom they are sent.

And what we should learn from the Consideration of this Point, is, To beware how we pass a Judgment upon any Man, from what befalls him in this Life; Because such Judgment, if it be not false, is, at the best, rash and uncertain; and we cannot, as the Wise Man says, *Eccles. ix. 1, 2.* know Love or Hatred by all that is before us; for all things come alike to all, and there is one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked. And tho' nothing comes to pass by Chance; and no Evil of any kind, ever befalls any Man, but by the Designation of the divine Providence; yet the very same Event, which to one Man is an Expression of G O D's Anger, to another Man may be an Instance and Token of his Kindness; and therefore, when we cannot certainly tell which it is, Charity obliges us to believe the best.

And this leads me to the Second thing propounded; which was,

II. To shew what other wise Ends of Providence are serv'd by the temporal Evils and Afflictions which befall Men. *Neither hath this Man sinned, nor his Parents,* that he was born blind, *but that the Works of God should be made manifest in him.*

Y.

And

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And what was said of this Man's Blindness, is as true of any other worldly Evil that at any time befalls any Man; If it be not intended for Punishment (as it is not always) there are some other Works of GOD that may be manifested thereby: some other wise Ends of Providence that 'tis design'd for.

Psal. xxxvi.

6.

Rom. xi. 33.

But in discoursing on this Head, it would be great Presumption to pretend to mention all the Ends of Providence, in any of its Dispensations; seeing *the Righteousness of God is like the great Mountains, and his Judgments are a great Deep, and his Ways past finding out.* Nevertheless there are two Ends of Providence, which are general; and which, I believe, we may say, are always design'd in all the Afflictions of good Men, besides others which may be special and peculiar to some Cases, or which we may not have Wisdom enough to discern; viz. 1. The spiritual Improvement of the Persons afflicted, whereby they will be entitled to a greater Reward in Heaven: And, 2. The Benefit of others, who beholding their good Example, may be thereby both directed and encourag'd in the Practice of those Vertues which are proper to an afflicted State.

1. One End of Providence, in sending Afflictions upon good Men, is for their spiritual Improvement in Grace and Vertue, whereby they will be entitled to a greater Reward in the other World. For there is no Man so good, but he may be made better, and there is no one State of Life, in which there is Opportunity of exercising all Vertues; And therefore tho' a Man be as perfect as any Man can be, in that State wherein he now is; yet if he

be

be called to another State, and hath Trial made of him another Way, he may, and if he acquits himself well, he will thereby be rendred more perfect.

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And accordingly, 'tis observ'd by the Apostle, *Heb. ii. 10.* that even our Blessed Lord and Saviour himself was made perfect thro' *Sufferings*; and *Heb. v. 8.* that though he were a Son, yet he learned Obedience by the Things which he suffered: And that this same is the Design of GOD in the Chastisement and Correction of all his Sons, we are told by the same Apostle, *Heb. xii. 10, 11.* He chasteneth us for our Profit, that we might be Partakers of his Holiness. And though no Chastning for the present, seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable Fruit of Righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

And upon this Account the Holy Psalmist thankfully acknowledges the Kindness of GOD, in laying Afflictions upon him, *Psal. cxix. 71.* *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy Statutes.* And the Apostle exhorts us, to count it all Joy, when we fall into divers Temptations; knowing this, that the Trying of our Faith worketh Patience; And let Patience, says he, have her perfect Work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Jam. i. 2, 3, 4.

So that to what was said before, that temporal Adversities and Afflictions are not always Marks of GOD's Displeasure, we may now add this; that when they befall good Men, they are Tokens and Expressions of his Kindness. He means thereby to make them more perfect in Holiness, that so they may be capable of a more perfect Happiness; these light

Serm. Afflictions which are but for a Moment, working
 X. for them a far more exceeding and eternal Weight
 of Glory: as the Apostle speaks, 2 Cor. iv. 17.
 For the more they are try'd, the more they
 will be refin'd and purify'd. And the great-
 er Difficulties they are put to encounter, being
 enabled by the divine Grace to conquer them,
 their Victory will be so much the greater, when
 they overcome; and their Crown will be so
 much the more glorious.

And therefore our Saviour pronounces a
 Blessedness to such as are revild and persecu-
 ted; and commands his Disciples rather to
 rejoyce, than to be cast down, when such things
 happen to them, *Matt. v. 10, 11, 12. Blessed are
 they which are persecuted for Righteousness sake;
 for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are
 ye when Men shall revile you and persecute you.
 —Rejoyce and be exceeding glad, for great is
 your Reward in Heaven.*

And that this was one End and Design of
 Providence in the Afflictions of our late Mar-
 tyr'd Sovereign King CHARLES the First,
 cannot be doubted by those who reflect up-
 on his Carriage and Deportment under his
 Afflictions.

An excellent Man, indeed, he was before:
 But nevertheless we may truly affirm, that
 he was much improved and bettered by his
 Sufferings. And of his Profiting under them,
 all they were Witnesses (not only his Ser-
 vants, his Chaplains, his Friends; but even
 his Enemies) who attended him in his
 Restraints, and have given Testimony to
 the World of his Piety and Meekness and
 Patience and Charity. And that excellent

Book

Book * Composed by himself, in the time of his Distresses, will, I suppose, be an everlasting Evidence thereof to after Ages, notwithstanding the Endeavours that have been formerly used by some to prove it spurious; and the Confidence of a late † Author asserting it to be so, without either producing any new Evidence for the Proof of his Assertion; or offering one Word in Answer to those just and rational Exceptions that had been made before to those only Testimonies which he insists upon, to prove it a Forgery; or making any Exceptions to those later Evidences that have been produced to prove it Authentick.

* ΕΙΣΗΓΗΓΗ
ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΗ,
or, The Por-
traiture of
His Sacred
Majesty in his
Solitudes and
Sufferings.

† Life of John
Milton, Prin-
ted 1699.

Vindication of
K. Charles the
Martyr, &c.
2d Edition,
with Addi-
tions, 1697.

But (to use his own Phrase) *We may cease to wonder* that He should have the Boldness, without Proof, and against Proof, to deny the Authority of this Book, who is such an Infidel as to doubt, and is Shameless and Impudent enough, even in Print, and in a Christian Country, publicly to affront our Holy Religion, by declaring his Doubt, *That several Pieces under the Name of Christ and his Apostles*, he must mean those now received by the whole Christian Church, for I know of no other, *are supposititious; altho' through the Remoteness of those Ages, the Death of the Persons concerned, and the Decay of other Monuments which might give us true Information, the Spuriousness thereof is yet undiscovered.*

Life of J. Mil-
ton, p. 91, 92.

And 'tis much to be feared that all your pious Designs and Endeavours to suppress Vice and Immorality (for which, if they succeed according to the Hopes of all good Men, you will highly deserve the Blessing, not only of the present Age, but of all Posterity too, which

Serm. will inherit a Blessing by your means ; 'tis, I say,
 X. much to be feared, that these your pious Designs and Endeavours) will not have altogether so good an Effect as might be wished ; so long as the Foundation of all Revealed Religion is so openly struck at, and the publick Records and Evidences of our Christianity, are, without Controul or Censure, suffered to be called in Question ; For if any of the *Pieces* (as he calls them) *under the Name of Christ and his Apostles*, which are received by the whole Christian Church, as Portions of divine Revelation, are *scurious and supposititious*, who can tell but that those which forbid Swearing, and Drunkenness, and Fornication, and Adultery, and other abominable Lusts not fit to be named, are so, as well as those (which I suppose this Author chiefly aims at) which deliver to us the Doctrine of the Trinity, and other Articles of our Christian Faith ? And therefore seeing the heavenly Doctrines, and the pure and perfect Precepts of Christianity are both *built upon the same Foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner Stone* ; if this Foundation be peck'd at and undermin'd, and so weakned, that one Part of the Building falls to the Ground, I doubt it will be impossible, by any Art, to uphold the other.—But to return to my Subject.—

2. Another End of GOD's Providence in sending Afflictions upon good Men, is for the Benefit of others ; who beholding their good Example, may be thereby both directed and encouraged in the Practice of those Vertues which are proper to an afflicted State.

This was probably the Reason of *Jab's* Afflictions ; This most certainly was one Reason why

why the History thereof, and of his Behaviour under them is recorded in the Holy Scripture; that by his Example others might be incited to the like Patience and Submission to the divine Will, under all the Adversities of this Life.

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X.

Nay this was, in part, the Design even of our Saviour's Sufferings, as we are told by St. Peter, 1 Pet. ii. 21. *Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an Example, that ye should follow his Steps.*

And therefore, this also, we may reasonably think was one End and Design of Providence, in the Afflictions of our late Martyred Sovereign, whose Memory we this Day Celebrate.

For to excite Men to the Practice of difficult Vertues, there is need, not only of Precept to direct, and of Promise to stir up their Endeavours; but likewise of Example; to show them that the Duties commanded them are not impracticable; and thereby to encourage them to do their utmost, in an Assurance that their Labour shall not be in vain.

And the Examples of Kings and great Persons being generally the most taken Notice of; and also, upon other Accounts more influential than the Examples of meaner Men; it was agreeable to the Goodness of God, and the Wisdom of Providence, to chuse him out for this purpose, that he might be an excellent Example to his own, and to all succeeding Ages, of all the Graces and Virtues, that are proper to almost every State and Condition of Life that Men can be in; And to this End, it was expedient that God should expose him to divers Temptations, and put him upon almost every kind of Trial. In all which he acquit-

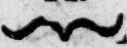
Serm. ted himself bravely, like a Man, and like a
 X. Christian.

For in his Prosperity, he was not high-minded; he did not trust in uncertain Riches; he did not forget GOD; he did not despise the Poor; he was guilty of no Excess in the Use of sensual Pleasures. So that in him, amidst the Glories of a Crown, and the Splendor and Plenty of a Court, you might have seen all that Humility, that Temperance, that Chastity, that Contempt of the World, that Mortification and Self-denial, and that strict and regular Piety and Devotion, which might be expected, but is not always found even in a Religious Cloyster.

And yet in his Adversity, when it pleased GOD to make Trial of him that Way, he was no less an eminent Example of all the Vertues and Graces that are proper to that State. Indeed had he been always bred up in the School of Adversity, he could not have born his Afflictions better than he did; And this Consideration adds very much to the Excellence of his Example; because his Afflictions, as they were very grievous in themselves, so they were also highly aggravated by their succeeding to a State of the greatest Plenty and Prosperity. For 'tis no such great Matter for a poor Man to be contented, if he was always poor, and was bred up hardly from the Beginning; Nor is it so much Commendation to a Man to bear any Affliction patiently, after he hath been a long while used to it; But the greatest Trial of a Man's Vertue, is in bearing well a great Change of his Condition for the worse; And when from Plenty he is reduced to Want, from great Prosperity to miserable Adversity;
 from

from the highest Honour to the vilest Disgrace; if then he acquits himself well, and bears this great Change of his Fortune with Meekness and Equanimity, he becomes an excellent Pattern to the World, of the most difficult and heroick Vertues.

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Such therefore was that Prince whose Memory we now Celebrate; Who was exactly the same in all Conditions; and shewed himself even at the first Trial, a perfect Master of all those Vertues which are suitable to an afflicted State, which others can scarcely learn after they have been long in it. Such was his Piety, that in every thing that happened to him, he meekly resigned himself to the divine Will; and chearfully submitted to whatever GOD was pleased to lay upon him, in a firm Belief that what GOD ordered was best. And such was his Charity, that he freely forgave the rude Insolencies and Affronts of his own Subjects; even of those who had been in a particular Manner highly obliged by him; And he not only forgave them himself, but prayed earnestly to GOD, to forgive them too.

And this humble and dutiful Behaviour towards GOD, under the severest Trials; And this Charitable and Christian Behaviour towards Men, under the greatest Provocations to Anger and Revenge, fully justified his Integrity, and perfected his Example; so that now, from the various Accidents both of Prosperity and Adversity which befel him, and his Behaviour under them, all Men, in all Estates, may be Instructed in the Duties of their Condition; and by the Pattern of such a great King, and such an excellent Man, may be encouraged

Serm. X.  encouraged to the Practice thereof. And if it had not happened to this Just Man according to the Work of the Wicked, we should have wanted one of the most Excellent Examples of Piety and Virtue that ever the World produced.

And upon these Grounds, I suppose, it is, that the Church always Celebrates the Memory of *Martyrs* with Joy and Gladness; nay, and keeps even the Days of their Martyrdom, as Festivals, not as Fasts; as Days of Rejoycing, not of Mourning; viz. partly, because of the great Advantage which the Church reaps from the Instruction and Encouragement of their Example who have suffered for the Truth's sake; And partly, because those Days on which they Suffered the worst of Deaths, were even to them themselves, the best Days of their whole Life; the Days which did put a Period to all their Miseries, and give them Admittance to everlasting Joys. And therefore the ancient Church, called them not the Days of their Death or Martyrdom, but their *Birth-Days*; because they were then delivered out of an evil and troublesom World, and born again unto a New and endless Life of unspeakable Felicity; so that to them

Eccles. vii. 1. *the Day of their Death was, in truth, much better than the Day of their Birth.*

And upon both these Accounts, we also might very well Celebrate this Day of the Martyrdom of our Late Pious and Gracious Sovereign King CHARLES I. as his Birth-Day, and keep it as one of our highest Festivals; had he fallen, as the Ancient Martyrs did, by the Hands of Infidels, or Strangers;

or

or by any other Hands than our own. But this is our Unhappiness, and indeed a most just Cause of the bitterest Grief, and deepest Humiliation to us; that we can never think of his exemplary Piety and Goodness, without, at the same time reflecting upon our own great Wickedness; And that the more we admire his Virtues, the more we must condemn our Selves, through whose Iniquity it thus happened to him.

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For tho' the Justice of GOD may be easily cleared and vindicated in suffering the best of Men, to be grievously afflicted, to be reviled and persecuted, and even to be barbarously Murdered, by the Hands of the Wicked; tho', I say, these Dispensations of Providence, so far as they are the Acts of Providence, are, both just in themselves, and ordained to wise and good Ends; this will by no means serve to excuse those wicked Men, who are the Means and Instruments of the Afflictions of the Righteous; because every Act is to be judged of by it self, and not by the Effects which may follow from it, but are not the natural Consequences thereof. And if *we may not do Evil, that Good may come; and our Damnation is just*, if we do that which is Evil, tho' we design Good by it; as the Apostle Teaches, *Rom. iii. 8.* much less may we allow our selves to do Evil, only because GOD can bring Good out of it; and much more will our Damnation be just, if we do Evil with an evil Design, altho' GOD can turn our Injury into Good, to them to whom we meant it for Evil, or may otherwise so order it, that it shall produce very beneficial Effects to Mankind.

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Acts ii. 23.
iv. 28.

For who can think that the Persecutors of the Apostles and first Christians were the less to blame, because GOD in his Wisdom, so contrived it, that the Blood of the Martyrs became the Seed of the Church, and the most effectual means of Spreading Christianity in the World? Or who will go about to excuse from the greatest Sin that ever was committed, the Betrayers and Murderers of our Lord, because what they did, was what GOD himself had fore-ordained for the accomplishing the Redemption of Mankind?

And therefore, by the same Reason; Altho' the Sufferings of our Late Martyred Sovereign did, without all Doubt, conduce much to his own Spiritual Advantage, and to the increasing the Glory of his Celestial Crown; And He, by his pious Deportment under them, became an excellent Example to all others who are, or shall be called to the like Sufferings; And while we consider these Advantages thereof, both to him and us, we may justly Commemorate the same with Joy and Thankfulness; and might reasonably keep this, as we do the Days of other Saints with Feasting and Rejoycing; yet when we consider, on the other Hand, who were the Means and Instruments of his Afflictions; this opens quite another Scene, and brings a black Cloud upon this most glorious Day; and justifies the Wisdom of that Authority which has commanded us to keep it in a quite different manner, even with Weeping, and with Fasting, and with Mourning; because there is no Way to expiate a National Guilt, but by a National Repentance. For tho' it may charitably be believed

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lieved, nay tho' it be certainly true, that there was not an actual consent of all the People (perhaps not of an Hundredth Part of the People) even of that Generation, to this Act of great Wickedness and horrid Barbarity, **By which the Protestant Religion hath received the greatest Wound and Reproach, and the People of England the most unsupportable Shame and Infamy**; yet when 'tis considered, that it was done by those, who had then, by the Help and Assistance of better meaning Men, attained to an uncontrollable Power; and that it was done *under the Name and Authority of a Parliament*; (tho' the Party which called themselves so, and which passed the Ordinance for erecting that prodigious and unheard of Tribunal, which they called An High Court of Justice, for Tryal of his Majesty were not a Tenth Part of the whole;) And when 'tis further considered, that a great many of those, who did not give an actual Consent thereto by their Voices, gave too great a Consent thereto by their Silence, and by their not endeavouring in time to hinder it; The whole Nation, I fear, can hardly be thought guiltless.

Nay, and even we also who live now, so many Years after the Act is done, may yet be justly thought to give too great a Consent to it; and to be, in some sort, Partakers with our Fathers, in the Guilt of shedding this righteous Blood; if we can speak of this villainous Act, or of the Preparations to it, without Abhorrence; Nay more, If we do not heartily grieve and mourn at the Remembrance thereof

*Stat. 12. Car.
2. c. 30.*

Serm. thereof. For if you look into *Ezek. ix. 4, 5, 6.* you will see that even in the Judgment of
 X. GOD himself; they which do not mourn for the sins of others, and especially for the publick Abominations that are done in the midst of the City or Nation to which they belong, are Partakers therein.

And besides, It may be also considered; That tho' we, who live now, were not any of us of the number of those that were actually concerned in this villanous Act, of Murthering the Lord's Anointed; being perhaps not then Born, or not of competent Age to be concerned in such Matters; yet 'tis an usual thing with GOD, (and what he has expressly threatned) to visit
Ex. xxxiv. 7. the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children, and upon the Childrens Children, unto the third, and to the fourth Generation. And if he sometimes does this, for private and personal sins; much more, may we reasonably think, he often does the same, for such sins as are Publick and National; because tho' one Generation passes away, and another comes, the Nation never dies; the Nation is still the same in this Age, that it was in the last, and will be the same in the next.

And this Threatning of GOD, I think, has been, in some measure verified upon us. For we have already felt many stroaks of the divine Vengeance, as we have great Reason to believe, upon this very Account. 'Tis reasonable, I say, to think this, because some of the Judgments which have befallen us since, have been the natural Effects and Products of this Days wickedness; for such, I think, we must all allow to be, those many Years of Anarchy

narchy and Confusion which immediately succeeded this bloody Tragedy; and also (to name no more) those dismal Fears and Apprehensions that we have since been in of Popery and Arbitrary Power; occasioned, in great measure, by the Expulsion of the Royal Seed and Education in a Foreign Country and Religion.

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That these will be the last Expressions of GOD's Anger against us for this great Sin, we hope; but at the same time, we have much greater Reason to fear they will not, so long as the same wickednesses do abound which have drawn down those many heavy Judgments of GOD upon us which we have already felt; And we can have no reasonable Assurance that we shall not be Punished yet seven times more for our Iniquities, unless now by a sincere Repentance, and a thorough Reformation of our Lives, and an unfeigned Humiliation of our Souls, and an utter Detestation of all such villanous Practices for the future, we endeavour to appease the Anger of GOD, and to move him to Compassion towards us.

This then let us do; and then let us Pray, as we are taught in our Litany, (and we may reasonably hope GOD will hear our Prayer) *Remember not, Lord, our Offences, nor the Offences of our Fore-Fathers; Neither take thou Vengeance of our Sins; Spare us, good Lord, spare thy People, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious Blood; and be not angry with us for ever. Amen.*

St.

St. Paul and St. James reconcil'd.

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A
S E R M O N,

Preach'd at *St. Mary's* in *Cambridge*, on *Commencement-Sund.*

June 30th 1700.

St JAMES II. 24.

To see then how that by Works a man is justify'd, and not by Faith only.

IF it was an usual thing to take Two Texts to a Sermon, I wou'd subjoin to the Words, which I have now read to you, those in *Rom. iii. 28.* (or some other Text out of some of *St. Paul's* Epistles to the same purpose,) *Therefore we conclude that a Man is justify'd by Faith;* and I wou'd read them both together, as the Theme or Subject whereon I intend to discourse at this time.

For this is indeed my present Design; not to handle these Words of *St. James* by themselves, that is, as laying down a Notion of Justification, to appearance, contrary to what *St. Paul* teaches in that other Text: But to shew

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that

Serm. that St. *Paul* and St. *James*, tho' they differ in
 XI. Words and Expressions, do yet really both
 teach the same Doctrine; that neither doth
 St. *Paul*, in excluding *Works* from having
 any thing to do in our *Justification*, mean to
 exclude such *Works* at St. *James* here declares
 to be necessary; neither on the other side doth
 St. *James*, in asserting the Necessity of Good
Works together with *Faith*, and as the Effects
 of it, mean to attribute more to them than St.
Paul do's.

But before I proceed to shew how these two
 Apostles may, as I think, be fairly reconcil'd,
 it may not be amiss to premise this one thing,
viz.

That if that Solution of this Difficulty, which
 I shall by and by propose, should not seem clear
 and satisfactory, and if we cou'd not think of
 any other way whereby these two Divine Wri-
 ters might, to our Apprehension, be reconcil'd
 together, and made to speak the same thing;
 it wou'd nevertheless, in that case, be reason-
 able to stick to the Words of St. *James*, in
 their strict and most natural Signification, and
 to suppose that St. *Paul* is to be interpreted by
him, rather than *he* by St. *Paul*; and conse-
 quently to take for granted, that the Doctrine,
 which we are here taught in express words
 by St. *James* (*viz.* that *Works* are necessary as
 well as *Faith*, to render us such as GOD will
 approve of and justify at the last Day) is un-
 doubtedly true, altho' we cou'd not tell which
 way St. *Paul*'s words might be fairly inter-
 preted in the same Sense. This, I say, ap-
 pears reasonable upon several Accounts. As
 namely,

1. Because we have an express Testimony of Scripture, that in St. Paul's Writings there are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest—to their own Destruction. And 'tis probable that those Places wherein he treats concerning Justification by Faith only, may be reckon'd into that number. And this St. Augustin says expressly; viz. That the chief Difficulty of all in St. Paul's Epistles, is his so much Commendation of that Faith, which he says does justify; by which ignorant Men understanding nothing else but only an Assent of the Mind to the Truths of the Gospel (which indeed is the prime and most proper Notion of the Word) do thence infer, that a good Life is not necessary to justify and save a Man.

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2 Pet. iii. 16.

And indeed if St. Peter had not made this Observation concerning the Obscurity of some of St. Paul's Writings, 'tis nevertheless no more than what every one that reads the Bible must needs observe; viz. that the Epistles of St. Paul, especially where he handles Controversy, are the hardest to be understood (except perhaps the Prophecies that are not yet accomplish'd,) of any parts of the New Testament.

And on the other side, it is no less obvious to be observ'd, that the Epistle of St. James, and this Chapter of it in particular, is, to Appearance, very plain and clear; and that, both in the Conclusion which it lays down, viz. that we are justify'd by Works, and not by Faith only, and also in the Arguments whereby this Conclusion is made good, from the 14th Verse of this Chapter to the end.

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Now if the case be thus, as it plainly seems to be, nothing can be more unreasonable than to interpret this Place of St. *James* by those of St. *Paul*, that is, a plain Place by an obscure one; and on the other side, nothing can be fairer than when we meet with any crabbed or difficult Place in any Author, to see whether his Meaning be not elsewhere express'd more clearly; and if it be, to conclude that the intricate Place hath the same Meaning with the plain one, altho' we know not how well to reconcile the Words and Phrases thereof to it.

And this is the Case here: For tho' St. *Paul* and St. *James* were different Writers, yet the Author of both their *Epistles* was the same, viz. the Holy Spirit of GOD, by whose Inspiration they both wrote: their Writings are consequently both of them Parts of that one everlasting Gospel, by which GOD will judge the World; and they do both of them contain (only in different Expressions) the Articles of the same Covenant between GOD and us. It is reasonable therefore in this Case, to observe the same Method that we do in other the like Cases, viz. to put such a Sense and Interpretation, on any difficult and ambiguous Passage that we meet with any where therein as to make it agree to and consist with those other Passages in the same Book or Writing, which seem to be more plainly express'd, and of the meaning of which there can be less Dispute.

2. Another Reason why I think (if we could not easily reconcile St. *Paul* with St. *James*) we ought rather to embrace the Literal Sense of

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V. Grot. in
Jam. ii. 21.

St. *James*, than that of St. *Paul*, and to conclude with him that Good *Works* are necessary to our Justification and Salvation, as well as *Faith*, is because (as is observ'd by several of the Ancients) this Epistle of St. *James* (as likewise the First of St. *John*, the Second of St. *Peter* and that of St. *Jude*) was written on purpose to rectifie the Mistakes that some had fallen into, thro' their Misunderstanding of some of St. *Paul's* Writings.

Now if this be so, we may reasonably conclude, that St. *James* designing this Discourse of his concerning *Faith* and *Works* as a Commentary upon, or an Explication of what St. *Paul* had written before upon the same Subject, was very careful to avoid all that Obscurity and Ambiguity of Expression, which had occasion'd the Writings of St. *Paul* to be so grossly misunderstood, and wrested to such ill Purposes, as St. *Peter* observes they had been by some ignorant and perverse Men; and consequently that St. *James* uses the Words *Faith* and *Works* in that Sense which is most natural and obvious, in that Sense wherein Common Readers were most like to understand them: whereas St. *Paul's* Epistles (I mean those wherein he handles this same Subject) being written with another design, as I shall shew hereafter, it may well be suppos'd that he, having in his writing them an Eye to his main Design, (which was to shew the Necessity of embracing the Christian Faith, and the no Obligation that lay upon *Christians* from the Ceremonial Law of *Moses*) was more careless in his other Expressions, as not fearing that any Person, instruct-

Serm. ed in the Christian Religion, wou'd ever so
 XI. grossly misunderstand and pervert his Words,
 as to think that he intended to give Encouragement to a lewd and dissolute Life.

But this, nevertheless, some did think, at least they pleaded St. *Paul's* Authority for it, That if Men did but believe aright, it was no great matter how they liv'd. Against these therefore our Apostle St. *James* sets himself in this Chapter, and shews at large that Christianity did not consist only in a true and orthodox *Faith*; that a bare belief in *Christ*, or of the Truths of the Gospel, without bringing forth Fruits in our Life and Conversation, answerable to such a Belief, would be in no wise sufficient to justify or save us.

And that in writing this, he had an Eye to what St. *Paul* had written before upon the same Subject, is farther probable, because he makes use of that very Instance of *Abraham* to prove the Necessity of Good *Works* together with *Faith*, which St. *Paul* had before brought against the *Jews*, to shew the sufficiency of *Faith* alone without *Works*, that is, without those Ceremonial Observances, which they wou'd have press'd upon all other *Christians*, and which they laid more Stress upon, and did put more Confidence in, than in the weightier *Matters of the Law, Justice, Mercy and Fidelity*.

This *Epistle* of St. *James* therefore being written after St. *Paul's Epistles*, and so very probably, with a Design to explain them where they had been misunderstood; it is reasonable to take for granted, that what St. *James* here plainly Asserts, touching the Necessity of Good *Works*

Works together with *Faith*, is the Sense of St. *Paul*, altho' we cou'd not easily bring St *Paul's* Words to it. Especially if it be consider'd farther in the Third Place,

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3. That tho' this *Epistle* of St. *James* had been never written; nay, tho' there had not been one plain Text in the whole Bible expressly Asserting the Insufficiency of a *meer Belief*, or of an empty fruitless *Faith*; yet we could not understand those Passages of St. *Paul*, wherein he so much magnifies *Faith*, and decries *Works*, in any other Sense than what St. *James* here plainly teaches; without making those Passages in St. *Paul* to evacuate all the rest of the Bible, and to contradict the whole Design of the Gospel.

For there is never a Page, hardly a Verse in the whole Bible, wherein the Nature of that Covenant which GOD hath made with Mankind is spoken of, which doth not either in express Words, or by plain Consequence contradict and disprove that wild Notion of being saved only by a bare Belief, tho' we take no Care to lead our Lives suitably to our Belief.

Now this is the Method that we observe in the Reading of other Books; We consider the Scope and Design of the whole, and judge of the Sense of particular Passages with Reference to that; and if there be any single Passage which we apprehend not the Meaning of, or which, at the first Reading, seems to have another Meaning than is agreeable to the Author's main Design, we build nothing upon such a Passage, but wait a while to see if the Author will not elsewhere explain himself:

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And if he do's not, and if at last we can't discern how that Passage can, without somewhat straining the Words, be reconcil'd with others; we conclude however and take for granted, that the Author (if he appears to be a Person of Judgment) is consistent with himself, and consequently that in that Passage, however the Words of it may sound, he did not mean to thwart and contradict all the rest of his Book.

Rom. i. 18.

And this is the Case here; for the Design of our Saviour's coming into the World was to make Men Holy; all that he did, and taught, and suffer'd, had a Tendency to effect this Design; and his whole Gospel is in a manner made up of Precepts, and Exhortations, and Encouragements to Godliness and Virtue, and of severe Threatnings against all manner of Sin. *The Wrath of God is, therein, reveal'd from Heaven, against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men, who hold the Truth in Unrighteousness*: These things are plain and undeniable; this is manifestly the Scope and Design of the whole Bible: and therefore altho' some few Passages in St. Paul's Writings shou'd, in their most obvious Meaning, seem to imply the contrary to this; it wou'd be reasonable, however, to believe and assert the indispensable Necessity of an Holy Life, together with an Orthodox Belief, rather than upon them alone to ground a Doctrine, which, if true, wou'd plainly evacuate all the rest of the Bible, and perfectly thwart and contradict the whole Design of the Gospel.

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And this I think a sure Ground for them to go upon who have not leisure to study the Point, or who after all their study, are not able clearly to discern how these two *Apostles* may be fairly reconcil'd in their seemingly contradictory Assertions; one saying, *That we are justify'd by Faith*, and the other, *That we are justify'd by Works, and not by Faith only.*

Which difference nevertheless I believe it is not so hard a Matter to reconcile, as at the first Sight it may appear to be; the seeming contrariety between them lying, as I suppose, only in their using in different senses, the Words *Justify*, *Faith*, and *Works*: every one of which Words is capable of, and is very often in Scripture us'd in different Senses. For,

I. As to the Word *Justify*, not to trouble you with the Etymology of it, which is but an uncertain way of knowing the common Acceptation of a Word; nor yet with the Sense which Heathen Writers have us'd the Word in, from whence we cannot with certainty collect in what Sense the Sacred Writers do use it; it may be sufficient to observe, That the most obvious and usual Signification thereof in Holy Scripture, is, to receive to Mercy, to absolve and acquit from former Transgressions. When GOD justifies a Man, it is by forgiving him his Trespasses, and accepting, esteeming and rewarding him as a righteous Person, altho' he is not really and strictly such. And thus St. Paul himself seems to expound the Word, in *Rom. iii. 25.* *Being justify'd freely by his Grace, thro' the Redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation thro' Faith in his Blood; to declare his Righteousness*

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Pfal. xxxii.

1, 2.

Rom. iv. 5,

6, 7, 8.

teousness for the Remission of Sins that are past, thro' the Forbearance of God. In which Text, being justify'd, and having our Sins remitted, seem to be us'd as Terms of the same Signification. And the Psalmist, meaning to describe the Blessedness of a justify'd Person, thus expresses it; Blessed are they whose Iniquities are forgiven, and whose Sins are cover'd; Blessed is the Man to whom the Lord will not impute Sin. And indeed, this is all the Justification that Sinful Men (and such all Men are) are capable of: for being in truth Sinners, they can't, by a just GOD, be acquitted as Innocent: they can therefore be justify'd no other way, but by having their Sins forgiven them, and by being receiv'd to Mercy; for if GOD should enter into strict Judgment with us, no Man living could be justify'd in his sight, as the Psalmist says, Psalm cxliii. 2.

Rom. viii.

33, 34.

Rom. v. 9.

To justify therefore, in the common Scriptural Notion of it, is, to absolve from Guilt, to discharge from Punishment; and accordingly it is frequently in Scripture oppos'd to Condemnation. It is God that justifieth, saith the Apostle, who is he that condemneth? And in another Place, Being justify'd by his Blood, we shall be sav'd from Wrath, thro' him.

Now taking the Word in this Sense, there is a two-fold Justification.

First, When we take upon us the Profession of the Christian Religion in Baptism; for then our past Sins are forgiven us, then we are receiv'd into a Covenant of Grace and Pardon.

But this is not a full Justification; for our Sins are not then clearly pardon'd and forgiven, because they may, after this, be still imputed

to

to us; and so they will be, in case we afterwards do either in Profession or in Works deny that Faith, which we then take upon us. Our *Second* therefore, and our compleat and final *Justification* is not till the great Day of Judgment, when GOD will for ever acquit from the Guilt, and free from the Punishment of all their past Sins, all those who continu'd faithful to that Covenant, which they entred into with GOD at their Baptism.

Supposing therefore at present that St. *Paul* and St. *James* do by *Faith* and *Works* both mean the same things: yet if they do not both speak of the same *Justification*; If St. *Paul*, when he speaks of *Justification* by *Faith*, means the *First Justification*, which is dispens'd to us in *Baptism*; and St. *James*, when he affirms that *we are justify'd by Works, and not by Faith only*, means the *Second* and *Final Justification* at the last Day; there is plainly no manner of Contrariety between them. For it may be true, that in order to our being admitted into the Covenant of Justification and Pardon nothing more may be requir'd, but only that we firmly believe and embrace the Christian Religion; (and accordingly we may observe, that as a previous Disposition to Baptism nothing else seems to be requir'd, but only that we should believe the Gospel, and in Profession renounce our former Sins, according to that of St. *Philip* to the *Eunuch*, *Acts* viii. 37. *If thou believest with all thine Heart, thou mayst be baptiz'd*;) and yet it may be true too, that our being put into a *justify'd state* by *Baptism*, will in the Event be no Advantage to us, but rather only increase our Condemnation, unless afterwards we continue true

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true and faithful to that Profession which we then take upon us, and are careful to perform our Part of that Covenant which we then enter into with G O D. Now, I say, this last seems to be what St. *James* affirms, and the first all that St. *Paul* teaches, at least in many of those Places, where he says, We are *justify'd* by *Faith*.

For that by the *Justification* which St. *James* speaks of, when he says we are *justify'd* by *Works*, and not by *Faith* only, he means our *Final Justification* at the great Day, upon which that Salvation will immediately be bestow'd upon us, which at our Baptism was only promis'd and assur'd to us upon certain Conditions, is evident, by his using *Justification* and *Salvation*, in this Dispute, as Terms equivalent. For thus he expresses the Doctrine of the Text, in the 14th Verse, where he first begins to handle the Subject; *What does it profit, my Brethren, if a Man say he hath Faith, and have not Works? can Faith save him?* It is plain that he means the same thing there by being *sav'd*, that he does in the Text and other Verses of this Chapter, by being *justify'd*; and consequently that by *Justification*, in this Discourse of his concerning *Faith* and *Works*, he means that *Final Justification*, upon which Salvation is immediately consequent.

And on the other side, that St. *Paul* in very many at least, if not in all those Places wherein he attributes *Justification* to *Faith* only without *Works*, means thereby only our *First Justification*, that is, our being admitted into the Covenant of Grace, and being put into a *justify'd* state

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state by *Baptism*, will, I suppose, be no less evident, if these two things be consider'd.

1. That in many Places he speaks of *Justification* as a thing *past*, which he could not do if he had meant the same thing by *Justification* that St. *James* does. For thus writing to the *Corinthians*, he says, 1 Cor. vi. 11. *Ye are*, or *Ye have been justify'd in the Name of the Lord Jesus*. And Rom. vi. 1. speaking of himself and other *Christians* that were then living, and consequently not finally *justify'd* in St. *James's* Use of the Word, he says, *That being justify'd by Faith they had Peace with God*. And upon this he grounds their Hope, that they should also, if they continu'd in Faith, be finally *justify'd* by God at the last Day, verse 9. *For if while we were Sinners Christ dy'd for us, much more then, being now justify'd by his Blood, we shall be sav'd from Wrath thro' him*.

2. It may be also further observ'd, That in many Places he expressly joins *Justification* with *Baptism*, as an Effect or Concomitant of it; as in Tit. iii. 5, 7. *Not by Works of Righteousness which we have done, but according to his Mercy he sav'd us by the washing of Regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost,—that being justify'd by his Grace, we should be made Heirs according to the Hope of Eternal Life*; and in 1 Cor. vi. 11. *Such were some of you; but ye are wash'd, but ye are sanctify'd, but ye are justify'd*; they were *justify'd*, it seems, at the same time that they were *wash'd*; that is, at their *Baptism*, when they openly and solemnly renounc'd those wicked Works which they had formerly liv'd in, and took upon them the Profession of the Christian Faith.

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Now therefore, if this be granted, which seems to be very probable, That *St. Paul* generally means this by *Justification*, (*viz.* only our being admitted into a State of Grace and Favour with *God*, at our *Baptism*, in which State if we continue by persevering in Faith and Obedience, we shall at last be *justify'd* and acquitted *finally* in the great Judgment;) it will be easie to understand all those Places wherein he attributes this to *Faith* only, in a Sense very agreeable to the Doctrine which *St. James* here teaches; it will be easie then to understand what *St. Paul* means, *Rom. iv. 5.* where he says, That *God justifies the Ungodly*; then I say, that Passage which hath been thought the strongest, will appear to be no Objection at all against *St. James's* Doctrine; the Meaning thereof being only this, That the Grace of *God* in *Christ Jesus* is so large, as that he does not refuse even the vilest and greatest Sinners, but readily accepts them to Favour, upon their Belief of the Gospel, and closing with the Terms of it: and there will be then no difficulty at all in understanding how *Abraham* was *justify'd* by *Faith* only, according to *St. Paul*, and how he was *justify'd* by *Works*, that is, not by *Faith* only, as *St. James* expressly affirms he was, at the 21st Verse of this Chapter. For the Case was thus: Upon his giving a full and hearty Assent to the Truth of the Divine Promises, he was immediately receiv'd into *God's* Favour and Acceptance, even before the Sincerity of his Faith had been actually try'd by his Obedience: *Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for Righteousness*, *Rom. iv. 3.* so that he was *then* in a *justify'd*

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justify'd state: and yet if after this he had declin'd to leave his Country and his Father's House, or even to sacrifice his Son at GOD's Command, he would by this Disobedience have fallen from that state of Divine Favour, and not have been *finally justify'd* by GOD; but then all his former (as well as his later) Sins, which had been once remitted to him, with a temporary and conditional Remission, upon his first entering into the Covenant of Grace, by *Faith*, (by vertue of which Remission, he was, while he continu'd in the Covenant, a *justify'd* Person) would nevertheless have been imputed to him, and he condemn'd for them, if he had afterwards swerv'd from his Obedience.

In short therefore, the *Justification* which St. Paul generally speaks of, is *that* whereby we are made *Heirs of Salvation*, as he himself explains it in the aforecited Text, Tit. iii. 7. *That being justify'd by Grace we should be made Heirs, according to the Hope of eternal Life*: but the *Justification* which St. James speaks of, is that by which we are actually admitted into the Possession of this Inheritance. And therefore, tho' in order to the *first Justification* nothing more be necessary but only that we close with, and accept of those Terms of Reconciliation, which GOD offers to us: yet in order to the *Second Justification*, it is moreover necessary that we should stand to and perform those Terms; that we should make good that Covenant which we before entred into; or else, tho' we are *now* already *justify'd* in St. Paul's Sense, that is, are now already by our embracing and believing and professing the Gospel, in such a Capacity and Likelihood of obtaining eternal

Serm. eternal Life, as an *Heir* is of enjoying his
 XI. Father's Estate; we shall never be *Justif'd*,
 in St. *James's* Sense, that is, we shall never
 actually possess and enjoy the Estate, but notwithstanding our present Heirship, shall at last be cast off, and disinherited for our Disobedience.

And this Observation concerning the different Senses, wherein these two *Apostles* do sometimes use the Word *justify*, may, I suppose, be alone sufficient to reconcile 'em in most, if not in all those Passages wherein they seem to differ. But,

II. The Word *Faith* or *Belief*, which they do both use in treating of this Subject, is likewise a Word capable of, and frequently in Scripture us'd in different Senses; and I believe it may easily be made appear, that in those Places wherein St. *Paul* attributes so much to *Faith*, wherein he is thought to declare that *that* is the *only Condition* of our *final Justification*, and Admittance into the Possession of the promis'd Inheritance, he means quite another thing by *Faith* than St. *James* does, when he says that *that alone is not sufficient*, even all that St. *James* means by *Faith* and *Works* too.

I will not trouble you now with all the Significations, in which the Word *Faith* or *Belief* is us'd in Holy Scripture; but shall take notice only of two, which I suppose most applicable to the Case in hand.

I. The *First* Sense of it which I shall take notice of, is that which indeed is the most obvious and proper Meaning of the Word; that is, when by *Faith* is meant, *An Assent of the Mind to the Truth of some Reveal'd Proposition*. And in this Sense St. *James* uses the Word: By that *Faith*, which being without *Works*, he
 says,

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says, is not sufficient to justify or save us, he plainly means nothing more than only a *Belief* of those Truths, which are reveal'd in the Gospel. And the Case that he puts, is this, That a Man believes there is a GOD, and that those things which he has reveal'd are true, and that all his Promises and Threatnings shall be made good, but nevertheless takes no care to live well; and in this Case he says, that such a *Faith* as this is an *empty, dead Faith*, and that it will be of no real Advantage to us, any more than it is to the Devils, who believe all these Truths as firmly as we can do, but without any Benefit to themselves, because the Promises being not made to them, they are not thereby incited to the Doing of Good.

But the Promises are made to us; and therefore it can hardly be conceived, it is scarcely to be suppos'd that any Man that firmly believes all the Truths of the Gospel, and considers his own Interest therein, shou'd nevertheless allow himself in a wicked Life. *Faith* is naturally such an active, lively and working Principle, that it can hardly fail to shew it self by it's Effects:

2. And for this Reason, *Secondly*, the word *Faith*, which most properly signifies nothing but the Cause or Principle, is oftentimes in Scripture put to signify both the Cause and the Effect too, that is, both a Belief of the Gospel-Truths, and also a Life led answerably to such a Belief.

And in this large and comprehensive sense 'tis clearly evident St. Paul does use the word in divers Places, and especially in those Epistles where he treats of *Justification by Faith*,

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Rom. iii. 27.
i. 5.
xvi. 26.

as may appear from his oftentimes using other Words and Phrases instead of the single word *Faith*. For what he sometimes calls *Faith*, he, at other times in those same Epistles, calls the *Law of Faith*, and the *Obedience of Faith*: And in *Rom. x. 16.* he most clearly explains his own meaning to be, to include and comprehend Obedience in the word *Faith*, whenever he attributes so much to *Faith*: *But they have not all obeyed the Gospel, for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believ'd our Report?* In which words the same thing is plainly meant by *obeying the Gospel*, and *believing the Report* of the Preachers of it; from whence it clearly appears, That the *Faith* or *Belief* which he so much magnifies in that Epistle, is not an idle, ineffectual Belief, but such a *Faith* as makes Men to be obedient.

Forasmuch therefore as the *Faith*, which St. Paul speaks of, when he says we are justify'd by *Faith*, includes in it all that St. James means by *Faith* and *Works* too; it is plain, That tho' we suppose that they do both use the word *justify* always in the same sense, there is not, however, any Contrariety in their Doctrines, altho' one says that *we are justified by Faith*, and the other, that *we are justified by Works*; and not by *Faith* only. But,

III. There is also an Ambiguity in the word *Works*; and it is not improbable, (nay, I suppose I shall make it very plain) that these two Apostles St. Paul and St. James, in their several Discourses upon the Subject of *Justification*, do likewise use this word in very different senses; and that St. Paul, when he excludes *Works*, do's not mean the same by *Works* that St. James

do's

do's when he affirms that we are justify'd by *Works*, and not by *Faith* only. Serm. 2
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And if St. James, by *Works*, when he affirms them to be necessary together with *Faith*, means those *Works* of Piety, Justice and Charity, and other Moral Duties which are required in the Gospel; as to any one that reads the former Part of the Chapter it will be evident that he do's; and on the other side, if St. Paul, when he excludes *Works*, means by *Works*, only, either those materially good *Works*, which Men might do without the Grace of the Gospel, or the Merit of Good *Works*, or else those Ritual Observances which were requir'd by the Ceremonial Law of *Moses*; then, tho' their Words and Expressions be different, yet their Sense may be the very same.

Now concerning this Place in St. James, I think there can be no Dispute; he plainly takes both *Faith* and *Works* in the most proper and usual acceptation of the words: by *Faith*, when he affirms that *Faith* alone is not sufficient, he plainly means a meer Belief of the Truths of the Gospel; and by *Works*, when he affirms that they are necessary together with *Faith*, he plainly means such a sort of *Life* and *Conversation*, as the Belief of the Gospel-Truths is naturally apt to produce, a *Conversation* becoming the Gospel of Christ: and both these he affirms to be necessary, in order to our final Justification at the last Day.

And on the other side, St. Paul, if at any time he speaks of the same Justification that St. James do's, means, by *Faith*, when he says we are justify'd by that only, all that St. James means by *Faith* and *Works* too (as hath been

Serm. shewn already) and by *Works*, when he says we
 XI. are justify'd without *Works*, he means only,
 either the *Merit* of good *Works*, or *such Works*
 as might be done by unregenerate Men without the Grace of the Gospel, or else the *Ritual Observances* of the Mosaicall Law.

And that he uses the Words in these Senses, and do's not mean to exclude from being a Condition of our final Justification, that hearty Obedience to the Precepts of the Gospel which a firm Belief of the Truths of it is naturally apt to produce, will further appear, if these two things be consider'd: 1. The *Occasion* and *Design* of those Discourses of St. Paul, wherein *Faith* is so much magnify'd, and *Works* are set so light by: And, 2. The several *Cautions* that are here and there intermix'd in those Discourses, as it were on purpose to prevent our mistaking his Meaning, and thinking that we may be sav'd by Faith alone, without a good Life.

1. We may consider the *Occasion* and *Design* of those Discourses of St. Paul, wherein *Faith* is so much magnify'd, and *Works* are set so light by; and which consequently do seem most to contradict the Doctrine here taught by St. James.

And I premise this first of all; That none of St. Paul's Epistles seem to have been written as if they were intended to comprehend the whole Christian Religion; they rather suppose Christianity already planted in those Places, to which his Epistles are directed. It was not consequently his Intention, in every Epistle that he wrote, to teach all the Principles of the Doctrine of Christ, and to lay again

the Foundation of Repentance from dead Works, and of Faith towards God; for all this had been done before; those same Apostles, by whose Ministry they had been converted and baptiz'd, having also then (according to the Commission given them by Christ) taught them to observe all things whatsoever our Lord had commanded. As such therefore the Apostle consider'd the Persons to whom he wrote, viz. as true Disciples of Christ, as Persons that had before been taught to obey as well as believe the Gospel; and so had no fear upon him, that by his using the word *Faith* or *Works* in an uncommon sense (and yet in such a sense as the Controversy he was handling led him to use them in) they to whom he wrote wou'd ever be in danger of embracing an Opinion so contrary to the first Principles of the Christian Religion, as it plainly was, to think that they might be sav'd only by believing, without obeying the Gospel.

The main Design then, I say, of most of St. Paul's Epistles, I mean of the Controversial Parts of them, seems to be to furnish the Christians to whom he wrote, with Answers to those Objections, which the Enemies to Christianity, among whom they liv'd, did make against it. And most of the Churches to which his Epistles are directed, were made up chiefly of Gentile-Converts, with whom nevertheless there were some Jewish-Converts also intermix'd, but the far greatest Part of the Inhabitants of those Places were profess'd Jews or Gentiles, who, though both zealous, each for their own Way, and against each other, yet readily join'd their forces together, as against

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Mat. xxviii.
20.

Serm. a common Enemy, to hinder the growth and
 XI. spreading of Christianity.

So that St. Paul had three sorts of Adversaries to deal with, viz. the *Gentiles*, the *Jews*, and the *Judaizing Christians*.

(1.) The *Gentiles*; who had been long bred up under the Institution of their Philosophers, and by their good and wholsom Precepts of Morality, were in a good Readiness and Disposition to embrace the Gospel; which, in general, commanded little more than they were taught before by their own Philosophers, only requiring a stricter and more perfect Observance of those Rules, and adding new Motives and Encouragements to it, from the plain Revelation of a future state of Rewards and Punishments, of which, before the Coming of *Christ*, Men had but an obscure Notion; and very slender Assurance.

The main Objection therefore which these had to make against St. Paul, was, that he took (as they thought) a great deal of pains to little purpose, in going about to establish a new Belief and a new Profession of Religion among them, seeing that as to Practice, they had been taught all the same things in substance by their own Philosophers; so that consequently they thought, he might have spar'd his labour. They were of the mind of our Modern *Deists*, That Natural Religion was so good and perfect, that it needed no Revelation to improve it.

Against these therefore the Apostle proves the Necessity of the *Christian Dispensation*, and of Faith in *Christ*, because tho' Men had been taught well before, they had never practis'd as they

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they had been taught; that by reason of the Weakness of Humane Nature, they had never liv'd up to what they knew was their Duty; that therefore no Man ever was or cou'd be justify'd in GOD's sight, by the Law of Nature, or the first Covenant made with Mankind, which requir'd strict and unsinning Obedience; that consequently it was necessary to believe in *Christ*, and to enter into that more gracious Covenant, which he by his Blood had made between GOD and us, whereby he had encourag'd good Works with better Promises, and offer'd to afford us divine strength and succour to assist our Endeavours: by which Covenant of Grace in *Christ* (tho' indeed we were still oblig'd to the same Duties which the Law of Nature had laid upon us) we might be justify'd, which by the other we could not be; because *that* requir'd strict and unsinning Obedience, whereas *this* made Allowance for the Weakness of Humane Nature, and left room for Repentance, if at any time thro' Carelessness or Surprise we should come short of our Duty. And to shew the Advantage of this Covenant made by *Christ*, and the Impossibility of being justify'd any other Way than by having our Sins remitted to us through Faith in his Blood, seems to have been mainly design'd by the *Apostle* in the former Part of his *Epistle* to the *Romans*.

Now the first Covenant made with Mankind being indeed a Covenant of *Works*, without Grace, therefore in Opposition to, and to distinguish *this* from *that*, he with good Reason, calls *this*, sometimes *Grace*, sometimes the *Law of Faith*, sometimes the *Preaching of Faith*, and

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sometimes barely *Faith*; which he says is the only Way by which 'tis possible for us to be justify'd, because our Nature is so corrupt and degenerate, that we cannot perform perfect and unfinning Obedience. But,

(2.) The *Jews* were also as conceited of themselves as the *Gentiles*, and as unwilling to accept of the Covenant made by *Christ*, because they trusted to be sav'd by the Observation of the Law of *Moses*.

And therefore the *Apostle* likewise, against these, endeavours to shew that they were Sinners as well as the *Gentiles*, and stood in as much need of a Saviour as they. And this he do's in the four or five first *Chapters* of his *Epistle* to the *Romans*; in some Passages of which (especially in the first and second *Chapters*) he seems to have a peculiar Respect to the *Gentiles*; and in other Places to the *Jews* more especially, and in some to both of them.

And the sum of his Argument is this; That since all, both *Jews* and *Gentiles* had sinned, and come short of the Glory of GOD, it was therefore necessary that a Redeemer shou'd come to make Atonement for their past Sins, and to establish a New Covenant between GOD and Men; which he calls *Faith*, or the *Law of Faith*, to distinguish it from the *Law of Moses*, which was truly a *Law of Works*; and by this Covenant of *Grace* or *Faith* in *Christ*, which was open and free for all to enter into, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, he says, might be justify'd, which they could not either of them be by the Law of Works, nor the *Jews* any more than the *Gentiles* by the Ceremonial Law of *Moses*; that being never design'd by GOD as a Condition of

of Justification, as having only Temporal Rewards and Punishments annex'd to it. Sermon. XI.

Seeing therefore the *Jews* as well as the *Gentiles* had broken the first Law given to Mankind, which requir'd unsinning Obedience, he says there was no means of Justification now left for either of them, but by *Faith in Christ*, that is, by coming into that New Covenant which *Christ* had establish'd by his Death, and offer'd to us in the Gospel. But,

(3.) Besides these two, the Apostle had also a *third* sort of Adversaries to deal with, which did cost him as much trouble as either of the former; and they were some who being born and bred *Jews*, had been Converted to Christianity by the Preaching of the *Apostles*, but nevertheless still retain'd such a great Liking and Veneration for *Moses* and his Law, that they thought they were yet bound to observe it as much as ever: and not only so, but they wou'd fain have forc'd the same upon the *Gentiles* too, telling them, that notwithstanding *Christ*, they were bound to be *circumcis'd* as the *Jews* were, and to keep the Law of *Moses*, and that otherwise they could not be sav'd.

Against *these*, therefore, the *Apostle* proves at large, (especially in his Epistle to the *Galatians*) that the Law given by *Moses* was never design'd to oblige the *Gentiles*, nor the *Jews* neither any longer than till the coming of *Christ*; that *that* Law was, to the *Jews* themselves, only a *School-master* to bring them unto *Christ*, that is, to prepare and dispose them to receive his more pure and heavenly Doctrine; that therefore now, after the Revelation and Preaching of the Gospel, that Law was of no further Use:

After

Serm. *After that Faith is come, says he, that is, after*
 XI. *the Gospel is Preach'd, we are no longer under*
 a School-master, Galat. iii. 25. That the Cere-
 monial Law was made up only of Types and
 Shadows, whereof *Christ* was the Substance, and
 that therefore the Substance being now come,
 they were to cease; that the Ceremonial Law
 was given only to exercise the *Jewish Nation*
 for some time, and was then to give Way to a
 better Law, the Law of *Faith* or *Evangelical O-*
bedience; that *Abraham* himself was justify'd by
 the same Means and Method which is now pro-
 pounded in the Gospel, viz. by a lively Faith
 in the Promises of *GOD* working in him a
 ready Obedience to whatsoever *GOD* requir'd
 of him; and that he was thus justify'd before
 he was Circumcis'd, and therefore so might they
 be too, without Circumcision, and such other
 Ritual Observances.

In the management of which Dispute with
 these *Judaizing Christians*, the *Apostle* calls the
 Christian Religion, as oppos'd to the Jewish,
 by the word *Faith*, to distinguish it from the
 Observation of *Moses's Law*, which was call'd
Works, or the *Works of the Law*. And using the
 word in this sense, he says, We are justify'd
 by *Faith*, and, by *Faith* only, that is, by the
 Faith and Obedience of the Gospel; and that
 there is no need at all of *Works*, that is, of such
 Works as were enjoin'd by the Ceremonial Law,
 which they laid such great Stress upon; for thus
 he often explains himself, expressly calling those
Works which he rejects, *the Works of the Law*,
 thereby plainly distinguishing them from *Works*
of Evangelical Obedience, and clearly intimating
 that it was not his Intention to exclude these,
 tho' he did those. Thus

Thus the *Apostle* manag'd the Controversy he was engag'd in with these *three Adversaries*: and that his main Design was to oppose One or Other of them in all those Places wherein those Passages are found which so much magnifie *Faith*, and vilifie *Works*, (which are especially the *Epistles* to the *Romans* and *Galatians*;) will, I suppose, readily appear to any one that shall attentively read them over; and I think it will be impossible to make out the Context, or to shew how those Places do at all tend to the carrying on these Designs, if we take the words *Faith* and *Works* in any other sense than I have before said St. Paul do's use them in.

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2. But, Secondly, That the *Apostle* St. Paul did not intend to exclude such good *Works* as St. James here requires (*viz.* Obedience to the Precepts of the Gospel) from being necessary to our final Justification at the great Day, will yet further and more plainly appear, if in reading over those *Epistles*, we do but observe the several *Cautions* that are here and there intermix'd, as it were on purpose to prevent our putting such an Interpretation upon his Words.

And first in the *Epistle* to the *Romans*, in Chap. ii. Ver. 6. he tells us plainly, that God will render to every Man according to his Works, Tribulation and Anguish upon every Soul of Man that doth evil; and Glory, Honour and Peace, to every Man that worketh Good: Which Passage would be very odly put in, in a Discourse wherein he was proving the Sufficiency of *Faith* alone for Justification, if thereby he had meant such a Faith as might be without good Works.

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But in the 13th Verse of that Chapter he contradicts that Opinion most expressly: *Not the Hearers of the Law, says he, shall be just before God, but the Doers of the Law shall be justify'd.* It seems then that St. Paul's Justification by Faith only, was not a Justification without Works; the Faith, that he there speaks of, must needs therefore be such a Faith as includes Works in it; *The Doers of the Law shall be justified.*

And so again, Chap. iii. Ver. 21. after he had said that both Circumcision and Uncircumcision must be justify'd by Faith, and that they could not be justify'd any other way; that they might not take Faith in such a narrow sense as to exclude good Works, he adds, *Do we then make void the Law thro' Faith? God forbid; Yea, we establish the Law.*

And to the same purpose again, Chap. vi. Ver. 1. *What shall we say then? shall we continue in Sin that Grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to Sin live any longer therein? And again, Ver. 15. What then? shall we Sin, because we are not under the Law, but under Grace? God forbid.*

And lastly, (to name no more) in the viiith Chap. of that Epistle, Ver. 1. when he was come to the Conclusion of this Controversy, having shewn at large the Insufficiency of all other Ways, and the absolute necessity of accepting the Gospel-Truths, in order to Justification, he goes on to shew the Blessedness of those who believ'd in Christ, in these words; *There is therefore now no Condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus:* but then, lest they should mistake him, and think that a bare Belief

lief in *Christ*, or the Profession of his Religion only, was enough to entitle them to this Blessedness, he adds, *who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit.* Serm. XI.

The like Care he has also taken in his Epistle to the *Galatians*, where he handles this Controversy again, with a special respect to the Jewish Law; where we may observe, that to prevent all Misunderstanding of what he had deliver'd touching the sufficiency of *Faith* without *Works*, he takes frequent occasion to declare his Meaning to be, only to exclude the *Works* of the *Law*, not the *Obedience* of the *Gospel*.

Particularly in the two last Chapters he is very large in explaining what kind of *Liberty* he had been before pleading for; *Stand fast therefore*, says he, *in the Liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the Yoke of Bondage*, Galat. v. 1. And what *Bondage* he meant, appears in the next Verse, *Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if you be circumcis'd, Christ shall profit you nothing; that is, If you still trust to be sav'd by your Jewish Observances, you disclaim and renounce the Covenant which Christ hath made for you, and so can expect no Benefit from it; Whosoever of you, says he, are justify'd, that is, hope to be justify'd, by the Law, ye are fallen from Grace. For We, thro' the Spirit, wait for the hope of Righteousness, by Faith; We, that is, we Christians, no less than you Jews, do wait for the Hope of Righteousness, that is, for a Reward of our Righteousness: but then it is not such a Righteousness as yours, a Righteousness consisting in the Observation of Rites and Ceremonies, but*
thro'

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thra' the Spirit, that is, by a Spiritual Righteousness; and 'tis by Faith, that is, 'tis such a Righteousness as is wrought in us by Faith, that is, by our Belief of the Gospel of Christ. For, says he, Ver. 6. in Christ Jesus, neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but Faith; not any Faith, but Faith which worketh by Love, or Faith which is made perfect by Love. Which words he repeats again in Chap. vi. Ver. 15. only instead of Faith putting in another word, not so ambiguous; In Christ Jesus, neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature. And the same Apostle in another parallel Place, in another of his Epistles, puts it out of all doubt what he means in the first of these Places, by Faith, when he expresses the same by Obedience; Circumcision is nothing, and Uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping the Commandments of God, 1 Cor. vii. 19.

And now by all that hath been said, I suppose, it sufficiently appears, that by *Faith* St. Paul means something more than only a bare Belief of the Gospel-Truths, when he makes it the sole Condition of Justification; and that by *Works*, he do's not mean Works of Evangelical Obedience, when he excludes them from being necessary in order to it: so that St. Paul do's not, any more than St. James, exclude such good Works, as are the natural Effects of a true, lively, and Christian Faith, from being necessary together with Faith, in order to our full and final Justification at the last Day.

And from all that hath been said, I think it appears, that St. Paul and St. James agree very well together; which was the Point that I propos'd to make good. St. James indeed says here

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here, that *Faith* alone, or a bare Belief of the Gospel, will not do without *Works* answerable to our Belief; To see, how that by *Works* a Man is justify'd, and not by *Faith* only: St. Paul, on the other side, says, that we are justify'd by *Faith*: but tho' his manner of Expression be different from, and, in the Letter, seemingly contradictory to St. James's, his Meaning is plainly the same. He affirms, indeed, that we are justify'd by *Faith*: but then, as I have shewn, he means the same thing by *Faith*, that St. James does by *Faith* and *Works* too; he means such a *Faith* as Abraham's was, (for that is his Example as well as St. James's;) he means such a *Faith* as however it is try'd, approves it self by a ready Obedience, as Abraham's did: and the *Works* which he rejects as *useless* and *unnecessary*, or as not *sufficient*, are not such as Abraham's were, the *Fruits* of a lively *Faith*: but either meer *Ritual Observances*, or else such *Works*, as tho' materially good, are not done out of a good and vertuous Principle. In a word, he opposes *Faith*, his justifying and saving *Faith*, not to Evangelical Obedience; but either to *unsinning* Obedience, by which none can be justify'd, because all are Sinners; or to an *Opinion* of *Merit*, which there can never be any Ground for; or, lastly, to the *Rites* and *Ceremonies* of Moses's Law, which Law, he shews, was not then obliging, and so could not be the Condition of Justification.

The Use we should make of what hath been said upon this Subject, is this; We should be hereby incited to the diligent Performance of that whole Condition that (according to the Doctrine taught by both these Apostles) is requir'd

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quir'd of us in order to Salvation; which is, not only to Believe in *Christ*, and to make Profession of the Christian Faith, but likewise to Live as becomes the Gospel of *Christ*, and to bring forth plenteously all the Fruits of Righteousness.

And this likewise St. Peter teaches, in his 2d Epistle, i. 5, &c. with whose Words I shall conclude; Besides this, giving all diligence, add to your Faith, Vertue; and to Vertue, Knowledge; and to Knowledge, Temperance; and to Temperance, Patience; and to Patience, Godliness; and to Godliness, Brotherly Kindness; and to Brotherly Kindness, Charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things, is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old Sins. Wherefore the rather, Brethren, give diligence to make your Calling and Election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an Entrance shall be ministred unto you abundantly, into the Everlasting Kingdom of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Which GOD of his Infinite Mercy Grant, for the Sake of the same Our Lord Jesus Christ; To whom, &c.

Uncha-

Uncharitable Judgment reprov'd. Sermon.
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A
S E R M O N,

Preach'd before the *Lord-Mayor*,
&c. at *St. PAUL'S, London*, on
the *Fast-Day* for the *STORM*.
January 19th 1703.

St LUKE XIII. 4, 5.

*Or those eighteen, upon whom the Tower in
Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that
they were Sinners above all men that dwelt
in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye
shall all likewise perish.*

THE Occasion of these Words you may
see at the first Verse of this Chapter:
*There were present at that season, some
that told Our Saviour of the Galileans, whose
Blood Pilate had mingled with their Sacrifices;*
that is, (as this Story is made up by the pro-
bable Conjecture of learned Men) who coming
to *Jerusalem* at the *Passover*, and being known
or suspected by *Pilate* to have been some of
the

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AG. V. 37.

the Followers of that *Judas*, spoken of by *Gammaliel*, who had maintain'd, that it was not lawful for the *Jews*, being *Abraham's Seed*, to whom *GOD* had given the Land of *Canaan*, to pay Tribute to the *Roman Emperor*, and thereby acknowledge Subjection to a Foreign Power; were set upon by *Pilate* in the very Temple, and slain by him while they were offering their Sacrifice; by which means their own Blood became mingled with the Blood of their Sacrifices.

Now with what Design this Story was told to *Our Saviour*, is uncertain; whether only as a Piece of News; or to shew the bloody Temper of *Pilate*; or to engage him to declare his Opinion concerning the Cause for which the *Galileans* suffer'd; or whether perhaps for some other Reason, which we now can't so much as guess at; But he from thence takes Occasion to Reprove and Condemn (what was, 'tis likely, then a common Practice among them; what is, I'm sure, too common a Practice among us, viz.) the Censuring and Judging as Reprobates and vile Sinners all such as fall under any remarkable Calamity, or are taken off by a violent or untimely Death. *And Jesus answering, said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were Sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you Nay.*

—Ver. 3.

And then, that this Saying of his might not be understood as meant to be restrain'd only to that one Case; he himself mentions another of like nature, which, it seems, had then lately happen'd in *Jerusalem*; of *Eighteen* that had been kill'd by the Fall of a Tower upon their Heads; and who, as it also seems, had upon this Account undergone the like uncharitable Censure; *Think ye*

ye (says Our Saviour, in the Text) that they were Sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

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For the better understanding of which Words, and of the Doctrine which we are therein taught, we may observe;

1. That Our Saviour here does not in the least discommend, much less does he forbid the attributing particular Events to God's Disposition and Providence; whether they are effected and brought about by the Malice and Wickedness of Men, (as was the Slaughter of the *Galileans* by *Pilate*;) or by the Efficacy of Natural Causes, (as was the Death of those Eighteen upon whom the Tower *Siloam* fell;) or by any other Means, or immediate Cause whatsoever. He does not in the least intimate that it was besides, or without the Knowledge and Disposition of God, that the *Galileans* were so slaughter'd by *Pilate*; or that the Fall of the Tower upon those Eighteen here spoken of, was nothing else but Chance, or evil-Accident. Nay the contrary to this he has in other Places of his Holy Gospel plainly taught; viz. That no Evil does ever befall us, but either by the special Order, Direction and Working of Providence; or by a limited Power granted by God to other Causes upon some special Occasion; such as in the Case of *Job* he gave to *Satan*, first over his Estate, Job i. 12. with an Exception of his Person; and afterwards over his Body, to afflict, but not to destroy it. Job ii. 4. For Our Lord has told us, That even the Hairs of our Head are all numbred; That the Care of God's Providence extends even to the Grass of the Field, and to the Fowls of the Air; That not

March. x. 30.

—v. 26, 28.

Serm. so much as a Sparrow falls to the Ground without
 XII. God, and therefore much less a Man, who is of
 more Value than many Sparrows.

Mat. x. 29.

—Ver. 31.

We may therefore, nay, we ought in all particular Events that befall Our Selves or other Men, to see and acknowledge the Hand and Providence of GOD; we may say, That it is his Work, and that his Hand has done it. Only what we ought to forbear, is, The pretending to give an Account of the Reasons of the Divine Administrations, to say why GOD has done this, or why GOD has done that; why he gave the Galileans into the Power of Pilate, or why he was pleased to destroy these Eighteen by the Fall of a Tower upon their Heads: For these things we can't certainly know without special Revelation, because the Ways and Counsels of GOD are unsearchable; we ought not therefore to pretend to know them; we do foolishly and rashly, when we offer to give our Judgment concerning them.

2. It may be further observ'd, That Our Saviour does not here deny but that the Eighteen spoken of in the Text, and likewise the Galileans that had been before spoken of, were Sinners, and consequently well deserved the Calamities that had befallen them; He only denies that they were greater Sinners than many others were whom the like Evil Accidents had not befallen; Suppose ye that they were Sinners above all the Galileans? or think ye that these were Sinners above all that dwell in Jerusalem, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay.

Altho' therefore, we may say in general, that all temporal Judgments are the Expressions of GOD's Displeasure against Sin, we can't take upon us to say with Certainty, What Sins, or Whose

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Whose Sins in particular they were that drew down the Judgment. And if one Man be stricken and another Man escapes, we can't say that he that was stricken was a worse Man than he that escap'd: We can't say that his being so stricken is an Argument that God was more highly displeased with him than he is with others who live to a good old Age, and at last die peaceably in their Beds; We ought not to conclude, that he is now in a bad Condition in the other World, because he far'd so ill in this; We should not deem our selves the Favourites of Heaven, or imagine our selves more Righteous than our Neighbours, because we escaped better than they. But rather the Examples of God's seeming Severity on others should put us upon examining and reforming our Lives; otherwise our own present Escape will be only a Temporary Reprieve, and what we flatter our selves is an Impunity will be only a Reservation of us for a greater Vengeance, *Behold,* says the *Apostle*, *the Goodness and Severity of God: Rom xi. 22* on them which fell, Severity; but towards thee, Goodness, if thou continue in his Goodness; Otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And, suppose ye, (says our Saviour) that these were sinners above others, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish: Ye shall likewise perish; that is, either by that or some other, perhaps by a much worse Calamity; Or if ye are not thus corrected and punished in this World, ye will for that Reason, be more sorely condemn'd in the next.

In Discourſing on theſe Words I ſhall therefore do theſe Two Things.

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I. I shall shew that it is a very unwarrantable and uncertain Judgment which we make of any Man from the Evils that befall him in this Life, or from the manner of his Death. *Suppose ye that they were Sinners above others? I tell you, Nay. And*

II. That the right Use that we ought to make of any Evil or Calamity befalling another Man, either in his Life or in his Death, is, by the Consideration thereof to be incited to reform and amend whatever is amiss in our own Lives, lest the same Evil that has befallen him, or a worse, should befall us. *Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.*

I. I shall shew that it is a very unwarrantable and uncertain Judgment which we make of any Man from the Evils that befall him in his Life, or from the Manner of his Death. *Think ye that those eighteen upon whom the Tower in Siloam fell and slew them, were Sinners above all Men that dwell in Jerusalem. I tell you, Nay.*

And in Discoursing on this Point I shall shew,

1. That there is no warrant from Scripture for passing such a Judgment.

2. That there is no good Ground from Reason for passing such a Judgment.

3. That such Judgment is liable to great Mistakes and Uncertainties.

4. That in some Instances, we are assured it would have been false.

1. That there is no Warrant from Scripture for passing such a Judgment. For it is no where in Scripture plainly said that every Good Man shall certainly be prosperous in this World, and that every Wicked Man shall certainly suffer some sad Calamity or be taken off by a

Violent

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Violent and Untimely Death. It is no where said in Scripture that a Good Man shall never die by a sad Accident, and that a Wicked Man shall never pass a Long Life in Health and Prosperity, and at last descend to his Grave in Peace.

Nay so far is the Holy Scripture from giving us any Encouragement to pass our Judgment upon Men from the Good or Evil things that befall them in this Life, that on the contrary it expressly declares that a certain Judgment can't be pass'd concerning any Man this Way. *There is a Vanity that is done upon Earth (says Solomon) that there be just Men unto whom it happeneth according to the Work of the Wicked; again, there be Wicked Men, to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the Righteous, Eccl. viii. 14. And I consider'd in my Heart even to declare all this (says the same Wise Observer, Eccles. ix. 1, 2.) That the Righteous, and the Wise, and their Works are in the Hand of God; No man knoweth either Love or Hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all; there is one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked; to the Good and to the Clean and to the Unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; As is the Good so is the Sinner, and he that sweareth as he that feareth an Oath.*

Thus you see plainly there is no Warrant from Scripture for passing such a Judgment upon Men from what befalls them here; and therefore such Judgment, being not so warranted, must needs be Rash, Uncharitable and Uncertain. Especially, considering, as I propounded to shew in the Second Place.

2. That there is as little Ground from Reason for passing such a Judgment, as from Scripture.

B b 4

For

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For if there be any Reasonable Ground for such Judgment, it must, I think, be drawn from the Nature of GOD consider'd as a Being of infinite Purity and Justice, and the Wise Governour of the World. But all that can with Certainty be argu'd from hence touching this Matter is only this;

First; GOD being of infinite Purity and Holiness, we may be sure that he hates Sin, and that he has a Love for all Good Men, but nevertheless from what befalls a Man in this World we can't judge certainly whether he be a Good Man or no; because the very same Affliction or Mishap, which by the Dispensation of Providence is sent upon one Man in Vengeance may be sent upon another Man in Mercy; what is design'd for Punishment to one Man may be design'd for a fatherly Correction only to another.

Again; GOD being Perfect in Justice, we may be sure that he never punishes or afflicts any Man undeservedly; but it does not therefore follow that he that is now punish'd is a greater Sinner than he that is now spar'd. For he that is now judg'd may be only *chastned of the Lord, that he should not be condemned with the World*; he may receive all his Evil things here, and have all his Good things reserv'd for another State; And he that is now spared may be kept only to be made a severer Example of GOD's Vengeance another Time, either in this World or the next. According to what is said concerning *Pharaoh*, *Exod. ix. 16. In very deed, for this Cause have I raised thee up, or, as it is in the Hebrew, made thee stand; (that is, for this Cause have I hitherto preserved thee in Life, and made thee to survive the Plagues that have taken away many of thy* more

more innocent Subjects;) for to shew in thee my Power, and that my Name may be declared throughout all the Earth. Thus, as St. Peter says, *The Lord knoweth how to reserve the Unjust unto the Day of Judgment to be punished.* Serm. XII.

And Lastly; GOD being the Wise Governor of the World, and also perfect in Holiness and Justice, we may be sure that he will judge the World in Righteousness, and Minister Judgment to the People in Uprightness, as the Psalmist says; We may be sure that he will render to every Man according to his Works; We may consequently be sure that he will make a wide Difference between the Good and the Bad; and may argue as Abraham did, *Gen. xviii. 25. That the Righteous should be as the Wicked that be far from thee; shall not the Judge of all the Earth do Right?* But it does not therefore follow that this great Difference that will certainly be made between the Righteous and the Wicked must needs be made in this World; 'tis enough that it will certainly be made some time or other: Now, or at another Time. Nay this Life being properly only a State of Trial, and the next of Retribution, it is most congruous that this Difference should not be constantly made in this World. Psal. ix. 8; Rom. ii. 6;

3. As the Judgment that we pass upon Men from what befalls them in this World is altogether ungrounded and unwarranted, so it is likewise liable to great Mistakes and Uncertainties; because we may be mistaken in the Nature of those things which we account Good or Evil; or, if we are not mistaken in that, if they are indeed as Good or as Evil as we think them, we may yet be mistaken when we judge them Arguments

Serm. guments of God's Love or Hatred, of his Fa-
 XII. vour or Displeasure.

And here opens a large Field of Discourse, not to be bounded by the utmost Limits that your Patience would allow to a Sermon; And therefore that I may not trespass upon it too much, I will have Respect, in what I shall say upon this Head, chiefly to the Case of such as those spoken of in the Text and in the foregoing Words.

(1.) Then, I say, We may be mistaken in the Nature of those things which we account Good or Evil.

Particularly; We usually account it a great Blessing for a Man to live to the full Term of Humane Life, which, as the *Psalmist* says, is *threescore and ten or fourscore Years*; and then to die peaceably in his Bed; and a great Misfortune for a Man to be cut off in the midst of his Days, to be taken away in the Flower of his Age; especially if it be by a Violent Death. But I say that if we consider the thing well we shall perceive that the Difference between that which we account a Blessedness, and this which we account a Misfortune, is rather Imaginary than Real; that it is not in the Things but in the Persons; because that to a Good Man any Death, at any Time, is a Happiness; *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord*; And to a Wicked Man who lives and dies in his Wickedness, the longest Life is no Blessing, and the easiest Death no Comfort.

To a Good Man, I say, an Early or a Late Death are either of them, in some Respects, an Advantage; for if he dies Young he is the sooner free'd from the Miseries of this evil World, and translated to a secure and everlasting Happiness

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piness, where he is plac'd out of the Reach of Sin and Temptation, and out of Danger of falling away from G O D. And is not this an Advantage? To be taken from his Work at Noon, and then to receive his Wages, when others are forc'd to endure the Burden, and Heat, and Toil of the whole Day; nay perhaps to continue till late Night, *working out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling?* But then on the other side, If it pleases G O D to grant him a long Life, this also will turn to his Advantage; For tho' he be not so Happy now at present as his Coæval is who died younger, yet he has this to comfort him and bear him up under the Toil and Labour which he is still to undergo, That the longer he continues in this State of Warfare, and the more Enemies he encounters and overcomes, his Victory will be so much the greater, and his Crown more glorious; That tho' he stays longer for his Pay he shall receive it at last with large Interest: That his patient Continuance in well-doing so long will be recompenc'd with a more ample Reward; And that his *Light Afflictions which* 2 Cor. iv. 17. *are but for a Moment, will work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory.* So that upon the whole Matter, every Good Man may say with St. Paul; Phil. i. 21. *To me to live is Christ, and to die is Gain.*

But now, on the other side, To a Wicked Man to die soon is a Curse, and yet to live long is no Blessing. For if he be cut off Young he dies like a Fool, and is hurried away into endless Misery, without having enjoy'd so much as his Portion of good things in this Life. And if his Days be prolong'd, still he's an unhappy Man; For the longer he lives the more time he has to account for; and every

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every Day's Misbehaviour will add to his Punishment; and the longest Life is but as a Moment in Comparison with that Eternity which he will then be condemn'd to spend in fruitless Repentance and unprofitable Sorrow.

Well but, However you'll say, It is better to die in an House than in the Street or Fields; to be carried to the Grave by one's Friends than to be eaten up by Fishes or wild Beasts. 'Tis a sad thing, you'll say, to be burn'd in one's Bed, or to crush'd to pieces by the Fall of an House; To be cast away at Sea in a Storm, or to be dri'd up and wither'd in an Instant by a Flame of Lightning; And the like.

I Answer; If Death it self be terrible, (as it certainly is to the Man that lives in Sin) it is and must be terrible, whatever Shape it comes in: But if it be not terrible in it self, (as to a good Man, who is at Peace with G O D, and in his own Mind, it is not;) I do not see why the Garb and Dress of it should so much fright us; Or why we should judge any one sort of Death much better or much worse than another.

There are, I think, but Two things that can reasonably be thought to make very considerable Difference between one sort of Death and another; viz. Either because One is more *Painful*, or else because it is more *Sudden* than another. We will therefore consider these Two things distinctly.

I. Whether a Violent Death be more *Painful* than what we call a Natural Death: For if it be so, I grant it is in that respect Worse.

But of this, I think, we can be no Competent Judges, because it is a Matter of only Inward Sense; for we never try'd either of them our selves,

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selves, neither have we spoken with any that have try'd either of them, and much less both of them. The only Way therefore that is left for us to judge by, is the Observation that we make concerning Others; And if Groans, and Sighs, and Complaints, frequent Swoonings, Convulsive Motions, and Fits of Madness, be any Indications of Extreme Pain, (and I think they are the best we know of) there will be nothing then wanting to persuade us, that they who before they die, lie burning many Days in a High Fever, or are tormented with a long Fit of the Gout, or Stone, or Cholick, in Extremity, do endure as much, if not greater Torture, than they that are Broken upon the Wheel, or Burnt in the Fire, or suffer any other sort of Violent Death.

The Truth is, Humane Nature is capable of so much Pain, and no more; And I believe there are many Diseases that cause us as much Pain as our Nature in this State will bear; and if any Pain exceeds these Limits, if it once grows Intolerable, Humane Nature sinks under it. Extremity of Pain will soon put an End to it self, and release the Soul from that troublesome *Vehicle* which causes it intolerable Uneasiness. So that in the State that we are now in, a Moderate Pain may be lingering and lasting; but if it be Violent, it can't long continue. But,

2. This perhaps may be accounted the great Unhappiness of a Violent Death, that it is for the most part *sudden* and unexpected; that the Soul and Body, those two Old Friends, are parted, without taking a solemn Leave of each other; and the Man is hurry'd away to Judgment, without any Warning.

And

Serm. And this, I confess, is a dreadful Consideration to a Wicked Man: 'Tis a sad thing for such an one, by the Fall of a Tile, or the Kick of an Horse, to be sent away into the Regions of Darkness, when perhaps he had never before once seriously thought of Death, when he had not made the least Preparation for it.

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But there are Natural Ways of Dying as sudden as by any sad Accident whatsoever; and 'tis as sad a thing for such an one to go away in his Sleep, or to die of an Apoplexy, or to be seiz'd with an incurable Lunacy. Nay, indeed, it is a sad thing for such an one to die at all; because no Death, 'tis to be fear'd, can be good, after a wicked Life. For 'tis not the saying, *Lord have mercy*, that will cure our evil Habits; that will kill our vicious Affections; that will render us, all in an instant, Good, Pure, and Holy, and such as GOD would have us to be. And to keep the Commandments, (which Our

Mat. xix. 17.

Saviour says is what, *if we would enter into Life*, we must do,) is manifestly another thing than 'tis only to own, (tho' with the greatest and truest Professions of Sorrow) that we have not kept them. But then the Suddenness of Death, is an Evil only to such as are not prepar'd for it by an Holy Life. For to a Good Man no Death is bad, no Death indeed is sudden; because a Good Man is always prepar'd to die, and is ever in Expectation of Death: And nothing can be said to be Sudden, but what was Unexpected, and Unlook'd for. A Good Man therefore, knowing his Time to be uncertain, never puts off the doing of any necessary Work of his Salvation till to-morrow, that can be done to-day: And he that

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that every Day does the Work of the Day, is always ready to give an Account to God of his Work; *And blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh, shall find so doing.* To him therefore it can be no Surprise, if as he walks about his lawful Business, he drops down in an Apoplexy; or if when he first awakens out of his natural Sleep, he finds himself in another World: And it is all one to him, if he receives his Death by the Shot of a Bullet, by a Flash of Lightning, or by the Fall of a Tower or an House. The Manner of Dying can make no great Difference, when either Way it is over in the Twinkling of an Eye; and when as soon as ever the Man's Soul is releas'd from the Prison of the Body, this House of Clay, it finds the blessed Angels ready to receive it, and conduct it to Heaven; and the Son its Redeemer, and all the Holy Company of the *Spirits of Just Men made perfect*, ready to congratulate its safe Arrival to the Mansions of Everlasting Joy and Blessedness. Or, if this be a Surprise, it is such an one as we should rather desire and rejoice at, than be afraid of; such an one as it was to St. Peter, when having (as I may say) left himself in the Prison *asleep between two Soldiers, and bound with two Chains*, he found himself, at his Awakening, under the Conduct of an Angel, walking in the Streets of *Jerusalem*. A sudden surprise indeed it was, but it was a blessed one; It was such as might well make him at first in some Doubt, whether what had happen'd to him was true, or he had only seen a Vision; but it was also such an one, as when he came to himself, and was sure of the Truth of it, could not but yield him great Pleasure and Satisfaction.

Act. xii. 6,
&c.

Thus,

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Thus you see, we may be mistaken in the Nature of those things which we account *Good* and *Evil*; And particularly, that a Long Life, and a Natural Death, are not so certainly Good; nor a Short Life, and a Violent Death, so certainly Evil as they are commonly suppos'd to be. The great Difference between the one and the other, depends upon the Goodness or Wickedness of the several Men to whom they befall: To a Good Man, all things are Good; and to a Wicked Man, all things are Evil: And the very same Event which to one of them would be the best, may to the other of them be the worst thing that could happen. So that we can't with Certainty pronounce any Man Bless'd, or Miserable, from the Accidents that befall him. But,

(2.) Granting the Common Opinion which we have of these things to be true, That they are indeed as Good or as Evil as we commonly think them to be; yet we may be mistaken, when we judge them Arguments of God's Love or Hatred, of his Favour or Displeasure. *No Man knoweth Love or Hatred, by all that is before them,* says Solomon; that is, No Man can certainly know how God stands affected towards any Person, by the things, whether Good or Evil, that befall him in this World. And the Reason of this I have already intimated, *viz.* Because this Life is properly a State of Trial only, not of Retribution; And while God is making Trial of Men it may be very consistent with his Justice, and Hatred to Sin, to spare when they deserve Punishment, and to seek by his Goodness to draw them to Repentance; and it may be likewise very consistent with his Holiness and with the Love that he bears to Good Men, to afflict them with

Tempo-

Ecc. ix. 1.

Temporal Evils, for the Trial of their Faith, Serm.
for the Exercise of their Patience, for the Cor- XII.
rection and Cure of somewhat that is amiss, or
for some other End that he designs to bring a-
bout this Way. Nay it may be very consistent
with his Goodness to take them off by a Violent,
as well as by what is call'd a Natural Death;
because how much soever that can be supposed
to be worse than this, G O D is able to make
them infinite amends in another State; and he
will certainly *make all things work together for* Rom.viii. 28;
good to them that love him.

I proceed now in the Fourth and last Place.

4. To shew, That as the Judgment which we
are apt to pass upon Men from what befalls them
in this Life, or from the Manner of their Death
is always Rash, Uncharitable and Uncertain, so
in some Instances that have been, we are assur'd,
such a Judgment would have been false.

For thus, he that from the Afflictions (the
more than common Afflictions) that befell *Job*,
in which also there were several Marks and Cha-
racters of a special Hand and Providence of
G O D, should have concluded (as *his* Friends
did) that however he had been blameless in the
Sight of Men he was nevertheless certainly
known to G O D to be a Man of Superlative
Wickedness, would have passed upon him a
Judgment directly contrary to the Judgment of
G O D himself, who testified of him, *Job* i. 8.
that *there was not a Man like him upon the Earth,*
a Perfect and an upright Man, one that feared God
and eschewed Evil.

And how false their Judgment was who
thought the *Galileans* that were slain by *Pilate*,
greater Sinners than the other *Galileans* that
escap'd;

Serm. escap'd; and those Eighteen upon whom the
 XII. Tower in Siloam fell and slew them, Sinners a-
 Joh. ii. 25. bove all Men that dwelt in Jerusalem; Our Sa-
 viour himself, who perfectly knew what was in
 Man, here plainly tells us; *Think ye that they
 were Sinners above all others, because they suffer'd
 such things? I tell you, Nay.*

But these however, it may be you'll say, were
 Sinners, and great Sinners too, altho' not great-
 er than some others that were not in like man-
 ner taken off. Thus much seems to be allow'd
 by our Saviour himself in this Way of Expression;
Think ye that they were greater Sinners?

And what if this be granted? Nay and what
 if it be further granted, that the Evil Accidents
 that befel them were in Judgment and Punish-
 ment upon them for their Sins? it does not
 therefore follow, that because they suffer'd worse
 than other Men in this World, they shall also
 fare worse than others in the next. Nay indeed
 the contrary to this may with better Reason be
 presumed; viz. That having received this Pu-
 nishment of their Sin in this World, by a Tem-
 poral Judgment, the Justice of GOD, was in
 and thro' the Merits and Satisfaction of Christ,
 thereby so fully appeased, as that the same Sin
 shall not be imputed to them to their Eternal
 Condemnation; according to that of the Apo-
 stle, 1 Cor. xi. 32. *When we are judged we are
 chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemn-
 ed with the World.* For it may be considered that
 the Judgment which the Apostle there speaks of,
 was not only of the Calamities of Life, but like-
 wise of that Temporal Death which was inflicted
 upon some that had been guilty of great Irregu-
 larities in the Celebration of the Holy Commu-
 nion,

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XII.

nion, as may be seen *Ver. 30. For this Cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep;* Even those that slept, that is, who were smitten with Death, as well as those that were smitten with Diseases were (as the *Apostle* seems plainly to intimate) *chasten'd of the Lord here, that they might not be condemn'd with the World hereafter.*

Thus tho' it be suppos'd that a violent Death were always sent for the Personal Transgression of the Man that suffer'd it, we could not therefore conclude, that because he was taken away in Judgment, he was so taken away in God's Displeasure as to be excluded from his Mercy in the other World.

But I said before, and that I still abide by; That in Judging a Man to be a Sinner (in any other Sense, I mean, than as we are all Sinners; *there not being a Just Man upon Earth that doth Good and sinneth not;*) Or in Judging a Man to be a greater Sinner than others, only because he comes to his Death by a sad Accident, such as that spoken of in the Text, or because he is taken off by any other sort of Violent Death; we pass such a Judgment as in some Instances of these Kinds would have been plainly false.

For what shall we think of the Prophet of *Judah* who was sent by God to Prophesie against the Altar at *Bethel*, and in his Return Home was slain by a Lion? whose Story you have in the *xiiith Chap. of 1. Kings.* 'Tis true indeed, he had transgressed the Order that was given him by God, not to eat Bread or drink Water there. But then 'tis to be consider'd, that his Transgression of this Precept (which was at most but a Ceremonial Precept) was not out of any Aversion he had to it, or out of a Rebellious Spirit;

Serm. for he shewed all the Willingness that could be
 XII. to comply with it; and when the King himself

Ver. 8.

had invited him to a Royal Entertainment at his Palace, he had refused to accept of his Kindness upon any Terms, even altho' the King would have given him half his House only to have din'd with him; and the Reason of his Refusal, he says himself, was because he had been otherwise ordered by G O D. And in the same Obedient Mind he continu'd after that, for having delivered his Message, he immediately set forwards on his Journey and was on his Way returning Home; when he was overtaken by a Reverend Old Man, who told him that he also was a Prophet as he was, and that he had lately received a Revelation from G O D, by which that former Order given him not to eat or drink there, had been revoked, and by which he himself had been commanded to invite him to his House, and to entertain him there with Bread and Drink. His Transgression therefore of the Order that G O D had given him, tho' not to be justified, yet seems not to have proceeded from any Wickedness in his Mind; He was indeed over-credulous in believing another Man's Pretence to Revelation against a clear Revelation that had been given to himself; but it appears to have been an Error of his Judgment only, not a Fault in his Will; for it seems highly probable from the whole Story, that he would not upon any Account, by no Inducements or Persuasions whatever, have been prevail'd with to go back, had he not been really persuaded that the other Prophet had indeed received such a Revelation as he pretended, vacating and countermanding, in that particu-

lar,

lar the Revelation, which had been before made to himself. Serm. XII.

But now the Crime of the *Old Prophet of Bethel* who lyed to this Prophet, and who knew that he lyed when he told him he had receiv'd such a Revelation, was manifestly exceeding great; For what Crime almost can be conceiv'd greater than it was to utter a known Untruth in the Name of God? Had therefore the Death of the *Prophet of Judah* by the Lion been design'd chiefly as a Punishment for Sin, the Wilful Deceiver, one would think, should rather have been so punish'd, than he that was (I had almost said, *innocently*) deceiv'd; His Crime being of the two, evidently, much the greatest. But it happen'd quite otherwise; The True Prophet was slain by a Lion, and the Deceiver and false Prophet escap'd, and for ought appears to the contrary, died in Peace in his Bed. It is therefore highly Probable that the Death of this Prophet who was slain by the Lion, tho' it might be truly call'd a Judgment of God upon him for his Disobedience, yet was not design'd by God so much for his Punishment, as to give Confirmation to the Truth of that Prophecy which he had before uttered against the Altar in *Bethel*. And this it did, even to the full Satisfaction of that False Prophet who had deceiv'd him; who therefore order'd himself to be buried in the same Grave with him, that so when the time should come wherein this Prophecy was to be fulfilled, as he was then well assur'd it would be, his Bones might not be disturb'd.

Another Instance of this Kind, wherein such Judgment concerning a Man from the manner of his Death would have been plainly false; we have in *Josiah*, who was slain by the Sword of his Enemies,

2 King xxiii
29. xxii. 4

Serm. XII. mies, and in the Vigour of his Age, under Forty Years Old. And now who that had read

only the History of his Death, would not have concluded that he was certainly One of the worst of the Kings of Judah, at least, much worse than his Grandfather Manasseh, who lived Sixty Seven, and Reign'd Five and Fifty Years, and at last died in Peace. And yet if you read the whole History of both their Lives, you will find that as Manasseh had been the very worst, so Josiah was the best King that had Reigned in Judah: For of him the Scripture it self testifies, That he

xxi. 1. *did that which was right in the Sight of the Lord, and walked in all the Way of David his Father, and turned not aside to the Right Hand or to the Left:*

Ver 25. *And in another Place; That like unto him there was no King before him, that turned to the Lord with all his Heart, and with all his Soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, neither after him arose there any like him.*

But there is no sort of Violent Death that can with better Reason be thought a Judgment of GOD upon the Person that suffers it, than that which is inflicted by the sentence of the Magistrate, who is GOD's Deputy and Vicegerent upon Earth, who Acts in GOD's Place, and of whose Judgment it is expressly said in Scripture, that it is GOD's Judgment. *Ye judge not for Man but for the Lord,* said Jehosaphat to the Judges whom he had appointed in the Cities of Judah.

Deut. i. 17.
2 Chron.
xix. 6.

Rem. xiii. 4.

And He, (says the Apostle, speaking of the Civil Magistrate) *is the Minister of God, a Revenger to execute Wrath upon him that doth Evil.* If therefore we might say of any Man that dies a violent Death, that he is smitten of GOD for his Evil Deeds, we might, I think, with the most Certainty

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Certainty say it of those who are formally Tried and condemn'd to Death as Malefactors by the sentence of these *Ministers of God*, these *Executioners of his Wrath*; and who are put to Death by that *Sword* which *GOD* himself has given into their Hands. But what shall we say then of those Ancient Worthies who by this very Judgment, were tortured, and had Trial of cruel Mockings and Scourgings? and not only so, but who were stoned, and sawn asunder, and slain with the *Sword*? for so the *Author* to the *Hebrews* tells us a great many were, of whom yet the *World* was not worthy. Or what then shall we say of all the Holy *Apostles* of our Lord, and of the Noble Army of Martyrs, both of the present and former Ages, who by the sentence of *GOD's Deputy* the Civil Magistrate, have been Condemn'd to various kinds of Death, by many Degrees more sad and painful than either the *Galileans* suffer'd who were slain by *Pilate*, or those Eighteen upon whom the Tower in *Siloam* fell?

Heb. xi. 35,
36, 37, 38.

When therefore we see any Man stricken, as it were, by the Hand of *GOD*, and taken away by a violent Death; either by the Judgment of the Magistrate, or by a sad Accident; tho' we may and ought to rest satisfied in it, so far as the Providence of *GOD* is therein concerned; firmly believing that *GOD* is *Righteous in all his Ways and Holy in all his Works*; We ought not however to say, Nay we ought not so much as to think within our selves; Surely this Man was a great Sinher; greater than we who are left alive; greater than others that die peaceably in their Beds, and in a good old Age. For whatever another Man has suffer'd is no more than we all, even the Best of us do deserve to suffer;

Pl. cxlv. 17:

Serm. suffer; And it is not any Worthiness in any of
 XII. us, but only the great Mercy and Long-suffering
 of GOD that has kept us so long in Life and
 Safety. And if upon this we take Occasion to
 Judge Uncharitably of our Brother, or to pride
 and please our selves in a fond Conceit that we
 are the special Favourites of Heaven, that GOD
 sees no Sin in us, and that we need no Amend-
 ment; we shall at length find to our cost that
 GOD's present Forbearance of us is only a Re-
 servation of us for some greater Punishment,
 either in this World or in the other.

And this leads me to the Second Point that
 I propounded to Discourse of; *viz.*

II. To shew that the right Use which we
 ought to make of any Evil or Calamity befall-
 ing another Man either in his Life or in his
 Death, is, by the Consideration thereof to be
 incited to reform and amend whatever is amiss
 in our own Lives, lest the same Evil that has
 befallen him, or a worse, should befall us. *Ex-*
cept ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.

For it is certain that all the Temporal Judg-
 ments of GOD are sent upon Men for the Pu-
 nishment of Sin; tho' not always of *their* Sin in
 particular, or of *their's* more especially who are
 stricken by it. For the Temporal Judgments of
 GOD are most commonly designed for National
 Punishments. And when a whole Nation de-
 serves to be rooted out for their Scandalous
 Wickedness, it is indeed great Mercy and Good-
 ness in GOD that he is pleased to make some
 few of them only Examples for a Terror to the
 rest. Herein GOD deals with a Sinful Nation
 as 'tis Customary for Earthly Governours or
 Commanders of Armies to do in the Case of Se-
 dition

dition or Mutiny; 'tis not fit that the Crime should be wholly unpunish'd, because then the Authority of the Governour would quickly become Vile and slighted; and yet should all that partake in the Crime be involv'd in the Punishment, the Execution would be too Bloody and Severe. In such a Case therefore they commonly mix Mercy with Severity, and take out by Lot, as they judge needful, One out of Ten, or One out of Twenty, or One out of an Hundred; and having done Execution upon them, let the rest go free, in Hope that by the Punishment which some have suffer'd, and which they all had been in Danger of, they will be deterr'd from committing the like Crime again.

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And thus, I say, GOD often deals with a sinful Nation; when it is *Time for him to Work*, PL. CXIX. 106. because *they have made void his Law*; he nevertheless, even in Judgment, commonly remembers Mercy, and smites only some, and lets others escape; cuts off some, and gives others a longer time of Trial.

And not only so, but in setting some out for Execution, he seems also to take them just as if it were by Lot, by meer Chance and Accident. In these National Judgments he commonly lets the Arrows of his Vengeance flie, as it were at random, just as if he were not at all concern'd who were stricken or who escaped. Such, I say, the Administration of his Providence in executing his Vengeance in this World commonly seems to us; and it must needs seem so, when, according to the best Judgment that we can make concerning Men, we see the Good and the Bad, the Righteous and the Wicked, and as many in Proportion of the one sort as of the other,

Serm. other, afflicted by the same Judgment, destroy'd
 XII. by the same Plague, or cut off by the same evil
 Accident.

And yet this Method of the Divine Providence, is in truth, the wisest that could be taken; the most suitable to the Nature and Design of *Temporal*, and especially of *National* Judgments; and wherein there is an admirable Mixture of Wisdom, of Justice, and of Goodness.

For should none but Good Men suffer in a National Calamity, this would make it look as if the World were govern'd by a wicked Spirit; and besides, would give too great Encouragement to Men to live in Wickedness, by making it appear to them the most probable Means of saving and securing themselves from Harm. It is therefore plainly necessary that in a National Judgment, some at least, should be chosen out from among the Wicked to be made Examples.

And yet, on the other side, should none but notorious wicked Men suffer in such a Calamity, this would give too much Ground to think that this Life was design'd by GOD for a State of Retribution as well as of Trial to Men; and consequently that there might possibly be no other Life after this. And besides, such an Execution as this would not so well answer the End of a National Judgment; For what Judgment or Punishment would it be to a Nation to have none cut off from it, but only such as it self would wish to be cut off? Such as it would be glad to be rid of? Such as being Disturbers of the publick Peace and Welfare would have been taken away by Humane Justice, if that could have

have its due Course against all Crimes and up-
 on all Offenders? But it is truly a Judgment
 and a Calamity to a Nation to be depriv'd of
 some of its best Members, to have those cut off
 that are the most useful to it, and do the most
 Good in it. So that a Nation is then most se-
 verely punish'd when the Judgment lights chief-
 ly upon such; the Loss of a few Good Persons
 out of it being a much greater Loss and Da-
 mage to it than it would have been to have had
 ten times the same Number of other Men taken
 away.

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When therefore the Providence of GOD
 takes this Course, and destroys both the Good
 and the Bad by the same common Calamity,
 This, both is an Argument of GOD's highest
 Displeasure, and also gives just Ground to fear
 that he designs not to stop at this, but to go on
 and punish the sinful Nation still seven times
 more for their Iniquity.

I say, First, It is an Argument of GOD's
 highest Displeasure at present. And in this
 Sense I understand those Words of the Prophet
*Ezekiel, Chap. xxi. Ver. 3, 4, 5. Say to the Land
 of Israel, Thus saith the Lord; Behold I am a-
 gainst thee, and will draw forth my Sword out of
 his Sheath, and will cut off from thee the Righteous
 and the Wicked. Seeing then that I will cut off
 from thee the Righteous and the Wicked, therefore
 shall my Sword go forth out of his Sheath against
 all Flesh, from the South to the North; That all
 Flesh may know that I the Lord have drawn forth
 my Sword out of his Sheath; It shall not return a-
 ny more. — It shall not return any more; that is,
 it shall go on Destroying till it has made a full
 End.*

And

Serm
XII.2 Kings
xxiii. 27.

—xxii. 30.

And this was what I further said: viz. that when GOD proceeds after this manner, destroying in any Publick Calamity the Righteous with the Wicked, this affords great Cause to fear that his Justice will not be satisfied with this One Execution, but that he intends to punish the sinful Nation still seven times more for their Iniquity. For so, when he gave good King *Josiah* (the best King that ever Reign'd in *Judah*) to be slain by the Sword of his Enemies, the Reason was because he was resolv'd to destroy his Nation, *to remove Judah also out of his sight as he had remov'd Israel*; and therefore he took him first away, *that his Eyes might not see the Evil that he was bringing upon his People*. And whenever he suffers good Men (especially if they were remarkably such) to be taken away by the Destroying Angel in a common Plague or Calamity, whoever wisely and religiously considers the Matter will always be apt to fear it is for the same Reason; according to that of the Prophet, *Isaiah lvii. 1. The Righteous perisheth, and no Man layeth it to Heart; and merciful Men are taken away, none considering, that the Righteous is taken away from the Evil to come.*

And as it is an Argument of GOD's severest Displeasure against a whole Nation, when he thus takes away (as it were without Discriminating) the Righteous and the Wicked, so this same is likewise an Instance and Expression of his wonderful Grace and Goodness to particular Men; Indeed, he shews herein as much Goodness and Tenderneſs to particular Persons as he could possibly do while he is executing his

his just Vengeance upon that whole sinful Nation which they compose. For what can be more gracious, what can be more agreeable to the infinite Goodness of that GOD, *who is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to Repentance*, than it is to take away in a Common and National Calamity, such as will be the least Sufferers by it in their own Persons, such as are fittest to die? and to endure with much Long-suffering the Vessels of Wrath fitted to Destruction; that is, such Persons as if he should then take them away must be unavoidably miserable to all Eternity; but who may (and 'tis to be hop'd, will) by this Goodness and Forbearance of GOD be led to Repentance?

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2 Pet. iii. 9.

Rom. ix. 22.

But if neither by the Judgment that has befallen others, nor by the Goodness that has been shewed to themselves they be brought to Repentance, their Case then will be worse than if they had been taken off sooner. For unless they repent, the longer they continue in the World they will have only the more Sins to Answer for; and by *Despising the Riches of God's Goodness and Forbearance and Long-suffering*, they will only treasure up unto themselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God, who will render to every Man according to his Deeds. Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Rom. ii. 4.

5. 6.

I crave your Patience only while I make Application of what has been said to our selves, with regard to a Case that has lately happen'd among us, and which is a principal Occasion of our present Meeting.

And

Serm. And I might almost say of the Words of the
XII. Text, as our *Saviour* in *Luke* iv. 21. did concerning a Text which he was then Preaching upon, out of the Prophet *Isaiah*; *This Day is this Scripture fulfilled in your Ears.* For we have had lately among our selves an Instance like to that spoken of in the Text, only much more severe and terrible. For many more we have heard of than Eighteen that have been kill'd up the Land, much in such manner as these Men were, by the Fall of Walls and Houses upon their Heads; And I fear I might say there have been more than as many Hundred Cast away and Drowned at Sea in the late dreadful Storm; none of which had more Reason to fear or expect their Death at that time than we had, who by the Goodness of *GOD* are still Alive.

Now why they were taken away, and why we were left, we our selves can give no Reason. Only this we may be sure of, that it was not because we were better than they, that they are dead and we alive; This we may be sure of, that there were not worse Men taken away than are still remaining among us; Nay, and it is further highly probable that there are not better Men now Alive than some were who by that violent Tempest were forcibly driven into that *Haven where they would be*, into the Haven of eternal Rest and Peace. It is impossible therefore for us to give a Reason of this Dispensation of Providence as to particular Men; and of what we are not able to make a true Judgment, the Judgment that we give, if it be not uncharitable, must at least be rash and uncertain.

Let

Let us therefore (as the Apostle exhorts, 1 Cor. iv. 5.) judge nothing before the Time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to Light the hidden things of Darknes, and will make manifest the Counsels of the Hearts: And then shall every Man have Praise of God. Think ye (says our Lord) that they were Sinners above all that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay. Serm. XII.

But whether they were Sinners or no; or whether they were Sinners above others or no, that have been taken away in this sad Calamity, the Calamity it self was doubtless a Judgment of G O D upon us all, even upon the whole Nation for our manifold and Crying Sins: And when the Judgments of God are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World should learn Righteousness. Isa. xxvi. 9. They that have been taken away by this Judgment, seemingly in G O D's Displeasure, are Examples to us of that Vengeance which we had all of us deserv'd, and which we had also all of us felt if he had suffer'd his whole Displeasure to arise.

Let not us therefore who have escaped, let not even such of us as have escap'd by a Signal or even wonderful Providence of G O D, (as some have done) think ever the better of our selves for this; For we are not by this absolved; our Judgment is but only delayed for a while. And it may be remembred, how that the Lord having saved the People out of the Land of Egypt, (and that too by Signs and Wonders, by a mighty hand and a stretch'd out Arm, yet) afterward destroy'd them that believed not. Jude 5.

But even this cannot yet be said of us, that we are saved; All that can be said, is, that we are

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are not yet destroy'd; but how soon we may be **GOD** only knows; and that too by a much worse Destruction than they were who perish'd in the late dreadful Tempest. For the same Hand that then smote us is still held over us; and tho' we hope that the Winds and Storms have already fulfill'd all that was given them in Command by **GOD**, yet the same Word at which they arose can arm and send forth any other of his Creatures for our Destruction. The same Power that has shaken the Tops of our Houses, can shake the Foundations also, and make them become in an Instant an Heap of Rubbish to cover and bury our dead Carcasses in; and He that has given so many of late to be swallow'd up by the Sea, can, if he pleases, command the Earth also to swallow up us that remain. Some Menaces of this kind, 'tis said, we have lately had in some parts of the Nation. But this we may be assur'd of, that unless we improve to good Purpose the Respite which **GOD** now affords us, we shall yet fall under a heavier Condemnation than if we had been call'd to Judgment sooner. *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

And that we have not yet repented to good purpose is evident, because for all the Evils that **GOD** has hitherto sent upon us, *his Anger is not turned away, but his Hand is stretched out still.* For there are four things which **GOD** calls his
 Ezek. xiv. 21. *four sore Judgments, The Sword, and the Famine, and the noisom Beast, and the Pestilence; the first of which, and (if David thought right) the*
 2 Sam. xxiv. *forest of all GOD's Judgments, The Sword, has*
 24. *been now, almost without Intermission, for several*
 ral

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ral Years past, and is still very heavy upon us; tho' (GOD be thanked) not so heavy as in other Countries where the Seat of the War has been; nor yet so heavy as it might have been, and, as we have Reason to fear, it still may be. For if in the War we are now engag'd in we should be unsuccessful, it may, and probably will be, in its Consequences, a great deal sorer Evil than any that has yet befallen us; and much better would it have been for us to have perish'd before, tho' by the worst of Accidents, than to live to see (which yet we must then expect to see) our Country devoured by Strangers, our holy Religion abolish'd, and Popery and Slavery entail'd upon us and our Posterity for ever.

Great Reason there is therefore that we should pray continually (as we do) for good Success in this War, on the Issue whereof the Fate of the whole Nation, both as to Temporals and Spirituals, does, to all Appearance, depend, And upon whatever other special Occasion we are at any time call'd upon to Fast, and to Humble our selves before GOD, in a Sense of his heavy Displeasure, it ought to be a considerable Part of our Prayer, That GOD would *be now with us to help us and to fight our Battles*; and that, *howsoever he may think fit to correct us for our Sins, he would yet never deliver us up into the Hands of those Men whose Mercies are cruel.* This is what among other things, we have been now begging of GOD; And I hope the Consideration of his great Displeasure against us, manifestly shew'd forth in the late terrible Storm, has made us do it
D d with

Serm. with more than usual Seriousness and Devotion.
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But Fasting and Praying alone will not obtain our Pardon; they alone will not avert from us the Judgments of God, or procure the Continuance of his Mercies. The Heathen Ninevites understood better than this by the Light of Nature only; And therefore when their Destruction had been threatned by *Jonah* the Prophet, they, by the same Proclamation which Ordered General Fasting and Supplication, Enjoined likewise a general Reformation of Manners; *Jonah* iii. 6, 7, 8. When the Word came to the King of Nineveh — he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh, (by the Decree of the King and his Nobles) saying, — Let Man and Beast be covered with Sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his evil Way, and from the Violence that is in their Hands. This is the Magistrates Part, to forbid, and (so far as in them lies) by wholsom Laws, and a vigorous Execution of them, effectually to restrain and suppress at least the open Practice of Wickedness. And in this, there has, I think, been nothing wanting on the Part of our most Religious and Gracious QUEEN. May all Her Ministers of State and Officers of Justice but do their Duties as well; May you the Magistrates of this Capital City be herein a good Pattern to the whole Kingdom; And may there be on the Peoples Part (and I pray GOD there may be in all of us) as ready and full a Compliance with Her Majesty's Pious Designs, as there was in the Subjects of *Nineveh*; and

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Jonah iii. 10.

and then we may reasonably hope that our Fasting and Prayer will be as availing as theirs was; that when GOD sees our Works, and that we turn from our evil Way, He also will repent of the Evil that he thought to do unto us. Then, and upon no other Terms, we may reasonably expect that he will bless us with Victory and good Success, and in his own due time with such a Peace as may tend to the Glory of his great Name, the Preservation of his Church and true Religion, the Honour and Safety of Her Majesty, and the Security and Prosperity of these Kingdoms.

Which GOD of his Mercy grant, for the Sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all Honour and Glory, now and for ever.
Amen.

Dd 2

The

and then we may reasonably hope that our
 fasting and prayer will be as availing as theirs
 was; that when God sees our works, and that
 we turn from our evil ways, He will also turn from His
 of the Fall that He thought to do unto us. Then
 and upon no other terms, we may reasonably
 expect that He will bless us with victory and
 good success, and in His own due time will send
 a peace as may lead to the glory of His great
 Name, the preservation of His Church and His
 Religion, the Honour and Safety of His Majesty,
 and the Security and Prosperity of these Kingdoms.

Which God of his Mercy grant, for the
 sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom
 with the Father and the Holy Ghost be
 all Honour and Glory, now and for ever.

Amen.

And thus ends the first part of the
 prayer for the year 1662.

Part II.
 The second part of the prayer for the year 1662.

*The Lawfulness and the right
Manner of Keeping Christmas
and other Christian Festivals.*

A
S E R M O N,

Preach'd at *St. Dunstan's in the
West*, LONDON, on
CHRISTMAS-DAY, 1704.

ISAIAH V. 11, 12.

*Wo unto them that rise up early in the
Morning, that they may follow strong Drink,
that continue until Night, till Wine in-
flame them.*

*And the Harp, and the Viol, the Tabret and
Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts: But
they regard not the Work of the Lord, nei-
ther consider the Operation of his Hands.*

THE Prophet had in the beginning of
this Chapter shew'd under the Para-
ble of a Vineyard, the base Ingratitude
of the *Jews* towards GOD, and the Judgments
which they might deservedly expect; Now,

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says the Prophet, *will I sing to my well Beloved a Song of my Beloved, touching his Vineyard. My Beloved hath a Vineyard in a very fruitful Hill. And he fenced it, and gather'd out the Stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest Vine, and built a Tower in the midst of it, and also made a Winepress therein, and he looked that it should bring forth Grapes, and it brought forth wild Grapes. And now O Inhabitants of Jerusalem and Men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my Vineyard. What could have been done more to my Vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth Grapes, brought it forth wild Grapes? And now, go to, I will tell you what I will do to my Vineyard: I will take away the Hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the Wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down, and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged, but there shall come up Briars and Thorns. I will also command the Clouds that they rain no Rain upon it. And then follows the Application. For the Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the Men of Judah his pleasant Plant; and he looked for Judgment, but behold Oppression; for Righteousness, but behold a Cry.*

And then after this general Charge laid against them of Ingratitude, Unfruitfulness, and notorious Wickedness, the Prophet proceeds in the remaining part of the Chapter to make it good in several Particulars, Instancing especially in their Covetousness and Injustice, *ver. 8.* their Intemperance, Prophaneſs, and Irreligion, *ver. 11.* their affected Blindness and Ignorance in their Duty, *ver. 13.* their Willfulness, Presumption and Impudence in sinning, *ver.*

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ver. 18. their prophane scoffing at, and despising the Divine Threatnings, ver 19. their confounding the Notions of Good and Evil, ver. 20. their foolish Conceitedness of themselves, ver. 21. their valuing themselves upon their Strength to do Wickedness, ver. 22. and their notorious Bribery, Injustice, and perverting of Judgment, ver. 23. And at the mention of most of these, the Prophet denounces severally a special *Wo* against the Persons allowing themselves in the Sins there particularly mentioned; and at the Conclusion of all, from the 24th Verse to the end, declares the high displeasure that GOD had taken against his People for these their many and great Provocations, and the terrible and severe Judgments, which he had already sent and executed upon them for the same, and was determined, if they still went on to provoke him as they had done, to continue and increase until he should have utterly destroy'd them. This is, in short, the Sum and Design of this whole Chapter.

The Words which I have chosen at present to Discourse of, in the Eleventh and Twelfth Verses, contain the second of those particular Charges against the *Jews*, which I before mention'd; And which I called a Charge of *Intemperance, Prophaneness and Irreligion*; and it is also one of those which denounces a special *Wo* against the Persons that were liable to it. *Wo unto them that rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, that continue until Night, till Wine inflame them. And the Harp, and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in the Feasts, but they regard not the Work of the Lord, neither consider the Operation of his Hands. And this I call'd a Charge laid*

Serm. XIII. against them, not only of *Intemperance* and *Sensuality*, (tho' that be the thing that seems to be most directly charged upon them) but likewise of *Prophaneness* and *Irreligion*; for it seems to be here intimated, that the Intemperance and Sensuality which they allow'd themselves in, was at such times as were specially design'd and appointed by GOD for a Religious Commemoration of his Benefits; *the Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts, but they regard not the Work of the Lord*; i. e. that Work of GOD in memory of which those Feasts were kept. It was therefore a Fault in them, and a great one too, that they regarded not the Work of the Lord, neither considered the Operation of his Hands; and it was another great Fault, that they allow'd themselves too freely in Gluttony, Drunkenness and Sensuality; but that which was a great aggravation of both these Faults was their Complication, that is, that they spent that very time in the Practice of these Sins, wherein they were under a special Obligation of exercising themselves in those Duties, viz. on the solemn *Feast-Days*, appointed and ordained on purpose, religiously to commemorate the Blessings and Benefits they had received from GOD, and to return him their hearty Thanks for the same. *The Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts*; there was Mirth and Jollity enough, and too much; but at the same time little or no Religion; there was not more too much of the former, than there was too little of the latter; for *they regarded not the Work of the Lord, neither considered they the Operation of his Hands.*

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This it seems was too often the *Jews* way of keeping their Religious Feasts: In the Feasting Part, they took care not only to do, but to overdo; but in the Religious Part they did nothing at all; so far were they from spending the time of the Sacred Festival in devout Praises and Thanksgivings to GOD, for those Mercies or Deliverances which those Festivals were ordain'd to Commemorate, that they had no regard to, or consideration of them at all; their only Care and Thought was to make Provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof; and in that they were as careful and thoughtful as they could possibly be; *rising up early in the Morning, that they might follow strong Drink, and continuing until Night, till Wine inflamed them.*

And I wish I could say that this was not also too often the *Christians* way of keeping their Holy Feasts; sure I am, 'tis too too commonly our way of keeping them; and especially of this great Festival of all, which we at this time Celebrate, in Memory of the greatest Miracle of the Divine Mercy that was ever shewn to Mankind, *viz. GOD's sending his own Son into the World for their Redemption.* On this Festival, (and shall I add too, in Commemoration of this Benefit?) what more Customary than for Men to *rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, and to continue until Night, till Wine inflame them?* Now, if ever, we look to hear the Sound of the *Harp* and the *Viol*, of the *Tabret* and *Pipe*; this is reckon'd the proper Season for Musick, and Noise, and Merry-making; now also is Wine in our Feasts; this is the Time, the
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Time of the whole Year, for good Eating and Drinking: But then our Thoughts are commonly so taken up, and our Time so much employ'd in these things, that we have no Mind to, or no Leisure for any thing that is good; *GOD is not in all our Thoughts, not now, I say, when in Reason he ought to be most there; we regard not in our Minds the Work of the Lord, neither do we consider the Operation of his Hands.*

But since the Case is so, will some perhaps be ready to say, that this Festival, however at first perhaps piously design'd, is now so very much abus'd, why is it not rather quite laid aside? Why should we continue the observation of a Feast, which is so commonly, so customarily, nay, so constantly, every Year an occasion of much Sin? And Time was, we have been told, and you may perhaps some of you remember, when this Counsel so far prevail'd, that this Day was by Order observ'd as a Fasting Time when the Churches on this Day were generally kept shut, and the Shops were order'd to be kept open; and a sort of *Inquisition* was set up against even those kinds of Food, which had been most Customarily in use at this Season. But what Warrant the then Reformers had for this, from the *Pattern shew'd to them in the Mount*, according to which they pretended to make all their Reformation, I could never yet learn.

V. Bp. Patrick
in Ex. xxiii.
14.

For the Jewish Feasts (the Feast of the Passover kept in Memory of their Deliverance out of *Egypt*; that of Pentecost, in Memory of the Overthrow of *Pharaoh* in the *Red Sea*, and of the giving the Law upon Mount *Sinai*; and the Feast of Tabernacles, in Memory of their dwelling

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ling so long in the Wilderness in Tents, and of the Wonders which GOD did there; these Feasts, I say) had, as is plainly intimated in the Text, been abused by some loose and dissolute Persons amongst the *Jews*, just as ours have been; they had been made by some the Seasons, they had proved to some the Occasions of much Excess and sinful Extravagance; But were they for this reason thought fit to be laid aside and abolish'd? Were they for this reason forbidden to be observ'd any longer?

No, perhaps you'll say, for these were of Divine Institution, and therefore could not by any Human or Ecclesiastical Authority be laid aside, as ours may be; the Celebration of which has been Ordain'd only by Human Prudence, and the Authority of the Church.

And this indeed is true; That those Festivals which were Instituted by GOD, could not be abolished by Men; neither could any Man, how much soever they were abused, have taken upon him to abolish them, without setting up his own Wisdom against GOD's.

I did not therefore ask why the *Jews* themselves, *i. e.* why the *High-Priest*, or the *Sanhedrim*, or the *King* for the time being, or whoever else is suppos'd to have had the Supreme Ecclesiastical Authority in the Nation; (I did not, I say, ask, why these) did not lay aside the Celebration of those Feasts, in which there had been commonly so much Luxury, Drunkenness and Intemperance, and so little Religion; but I only ask'd in general, why they were

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were not laid aside and abolish'd ; and laid aside, without doubt, they might have been, and abolish'd, by the same Authority by which they had been ordain'd, *i. e.* by G O D himself: But it did not you see seem good to the Divine Wisdom to take this Method of preventing the sinful Abuse of such holy Festivals ; all that G O D himself thought fit to do in the Case, was to warn the People against thus Prophaning a Religious Institution, and to denounce a *Wo* against those that did ; *Wo unto them that rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, &c.*

For he knew how insensible we generally are of the Divine Benefits, how apt we are to let them slip out of our Minds, and how necessary it is that our Memory thereof should be frequently refresh'd ; he knew how very requisite it was that some special Times and Seasons should be appointed for this purpose, there being great Danger that *that* good Work will never be done at all, for the doing whereof some special time is not appointed : He knew also that they that were wise and religious would consider and understand the Loving-kindness of G O D, not only in granting the Blessing or Benefit Commemorated, but likewise in ordering them to rejoice in his Goodness, and to continue the Memory thereof with solemn Praises and Thanksgivings ; and that such as were loose and sensual, and given to Intemperance, would not have been restrain'd from their Rioting and sinful Extravagances, only by abolishing such Seasons of publick Praise and Rejoicing ; but that if they had not had those, they would have taken other Occasions of fulfilling the

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the same fleshly Lusts; so that only to have abolished such Festivities, would not have been a means of reforming the wicked part of the World, *That* would still have been as lusting, as sensual, as intemperate, both then, and at other times, as it too commonly was upon the holy Festival; for the same corrupt Heart would, at all times and upon all occasions, have produced plentifully the same corrupt Fruits; but to those who were piously and well disposed, it would have been indeed a great Detriment and Disadvantage, by the abolishment of those Days, to have been deprived of those blessed Opportunities which were therein afforded them, of contemplating the Divine Goodness, and impressing the Sense thereof strongly upon their Minds, and working themselves up to the highest Degrees of Love and Gratitude to GOD their most bountiful Benefactor.

In a Word; 'Tis Matter of Fact, that these Festivals, tho' they had been much prophan'd and abus'd by some wicked and licentious Persons, were not, however, by any Command of GOD laid aside, or forbidden to be any longer observ'd; and 'tis, I think, highly probable, that the Reasons above-mentioned, or such like, were the Reasons why they were nevertheless continued: But however that be, since they were by the Wisdom of God thought fit to be still continu'd and observ'd, notwithstanding the ill Use that some prophane and profligate Persons had made of them; I can see no reason, why the Governours of the Christian Church may not, in a like Case, reasonably follow the Pattern which the Wisdom of GOD has

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 XIII. of those Christian Festivals (and of this in particular) which were instituted at first with a pious Design, and from the religious Observation whereof such are as piously and vertuously inclined may, and do, without doubt, receive much Spiritual Advantage, altho' there be now (as there were formerly among the *Jews*) some leud and prophane Persons, who, by their wicked Abuse of them, spending them in Excess and Drunkenness, and other Lusts of the Flesh, do hasten, ascertain, and much increase their own Damnation.

For tho' it can't, indeed, be said, It is not pretended by us, that any of these Festivals, or this of *Christmas* in particular, was instituted (as the *Jewish* Festivals before spoken of were) by the special Direction and Command of GOD; so that it might be abolish'd by Humane Authority (which those could not be) without opposing or contradicting a positive Divine Institution: Yet this we may say, and this we do affirm, That the Blessing and Benefit which we now commemorate (*viz.* the Redemption of the World by the Incarnation of the Son of GOD, who was manifested as at this Time, to destroy the Works of the Devil) was an infinitely greater Benefit, than the Deliverance of the *Israelites* out of *Egypt*, than the Destruction of *Pharaoh* and his Host in the *Red-Sea*, or than the miraculous Preservation of the *Jews* for Forty Years in the Wilderness; so that if they deserved to be kept in perpetual Remembrance, by Annual Festivals, instituted in Commemoration thereof, much more does this deserve to be in like manner remember'd with
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Joy and Thankfulness. There was good Reason therefore that the Church should appoint some Day or Days in the Year, whereon this should be done; for a Publick Work of Religion (as this is) must have a special Time appointed for it, or else it can't be done at all.

Now this is all that the Church does; she appoints a certain Time whereon all her Members should meet in Religious Assemblies, to Sing and give Praises to GOD for this his inestimable Benefit; and that they may be furnish'd with proper Matter for Devotion and Meditation, she provides Prayers to be used, and appoints Portions of Scripture to be read, and Sermons to be preached, suitable to the Occasion; and that they may have Leisure, and be in better Disposition of Mind for this holy Exercise, she discharges them, for that Time, from the Works and Labours of their ordinary Callings; and, as suitable to such a Time of rejoicing, she commends the Exercise of Charity and Hospitality; and she may, perhaps, be said also to *permit* (but that's the most that can be said) a freer and more plentiful Use of the good Creatures of God, than the Conditions and Circumstances of Men could furnish them with at all other Times of the Year; but all the while she strictly enjoins them to keep within the Bounds of Temperance and Sobriety; and whether they eat or drink, or whatever else they do, (not unbecoming an holy Festival) to do all to the Glory of GOD.

Thus, I think, it appears that there was good Reason at first for the appointing this Holy Festival to be kept, in such devout and religious

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religious manner as the Church has directed it to be kept. And if there was good Reason for its first Institution, there is, I think, the same Reason why it should continue still to be observed, and that notwithstanding some Abuses that have crept into, and some Inconveniences that have arisen by, the Observation thereof. For what is there so good that has not been misused? Or what is there so useful that has not been attended with some Inconveniences? Even in eating and drinking many Sins are every Day committed? Is it fit therefore that a Law should be made to forbid Eating and Drinking; Or that Publick Officers should be appointed to deliver out to every one his Meat and Drink by Weight and Measure? There is great Excess in Apparel, Would it be reasonable therefore to forbid the wearing of any Cloaths, or to command that no Cloaths should be made but such as are absolutely necessary, and those of the coarsest Stuff, and after the plainest Fashion? And as little Reason is there to abolish a Religious Festival, which was well designed, and which is of excellent Use to such as are piously and well dispos'd, and which, according to the Observation of it which the Church directs, is a very probable Means to reclaim even those that are vicious, and by reminding them of the Mercies and Blessings of God, which otherwise they would never have thought of at all, to bring them to some Sense of Duty and Gratitude, (as little Reason, I say, is there to abolish such a Religious Festival) only because some prophane Persons do, and will, take Occasion to spend it in Rioting and Drunkenness, and Uncleaness. For that they

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do thus spend it, whose Fault is it? Is it not their own? Does the Church, which appoints it to be observ'd, direct that it should be observ'd in this manner? Serm. XIII.

No, perhaps you'll say, that indeed she does not, she commands it to be kept in a quite different manner; but however thus, notwithstanding all the Provision she has made to prevent it, it has been kept, and thus (after all the Care she can take about it) it probably will be kept by a great many; and therefore to cut off Occasion from such as will take Occasion, we think it had better not be kept at all, but be made again, as it once was, a Day of ordinary Work and Labour.

And do you think then, indeed, that the Abolishment of this Festival would help very much to reform the World? No such matter. For do not they that eat to Excess at this Time, eat as much to Excess at any other Time, when they have Plenty before them of such Provision as they like? Are not they that are drunk on the *Christmas* Holidays as free to be drunk at any other Time of the Year, when they can find Time and Money for it? Do not they that now rise up early in the Morning to follow strong Drink, and continue till Night till Wine inflame them, do the same whenever else in the Year they can get to be releas'd for a Day or two from the Labours of their Calling? Are not they that now spend whole Days and Nights in excessive Gaming, to the neglect of their Business, and the wasting of their Estates, and the Impoverishment of their Families, as ready and desirous to do the same at any other Season of the Year, when they can meet with

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Serm. (and such are never hard to be met with)
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of the Flesh; the Consequence of which will be, that as then there will probably be less Vice and Loosness, less Rioting and Drunkenness, so there will be likewise less Religion and less Devotion; for these can no more be practis'd without Time than the other. And, I doubt, the World, in the whole, would be then much worse than it is now; for it is better, that with a Mixture of bad there should be some good Persons in the World, than that there should be none at all good in it; and none good there could be, if all Men were held to their Labours and their Burdens without ceasing, and without Intermission.

There is no reason therefore, I think, that any Day of Religion (no reason that this in particular) should be abolish'd, only because some People are so wicked as to turn it into a Day of Intemperance and Sensuality; because the abolishing the Day would not alone serve to prevent the Wickedness that is acted upon it; it would but only put off the acting it from this Day to some other Day; and, in the mean Time, they that are devoutly inclin'd, would, by the Day's being laid aside, be depriv'd of an excellent Means of Religion, and Help to their Devotion; and that great Mystery of Godliness, which we now commemorate, God manifest in the Flesh, would more seldom be had in remembrance and reflected upon; and in Time to come (this Annual Memorial of it being destroy'd and taken away) would be in danger of being quite forgotten.

Thus much I thought it reasonable to say at this Time to justify the Wisdom and Piety of

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the Church as well in still retaining the Observation of this great Festival, in Memory of the Birth of the King of Heaven, as in its first Institution, and that notwithstanding the ill Use that the Prophane and Licentious have made, and, 'tis likely, will still make of it.

But nothing can be said to justify their wicked Abuse of it; for, *Wo unto them*, says the Prophet in the Text, *that rise up early in the Morning that they may follow strong Drink, that continue until Night till Wine inflame them. And the Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts, but they regard not the Work of the Lord, neither consider the Operation of his Hands.*

The proper Application of which Words to the great Festival that we at this Time celebrate, will be, I suppose, by shewing, *First*, What that Work of the Lord is which we ought at this Time to have regard to, and to exercise our Meditations upon; *Secondly*, What Thoughts and Affections towards God, the Consideration thereof is proper to work in us, and what Influence it ought to have upon our Lives; And, *Thirdly*, lastly, How very unsuitable to the Occasion of our present Joy and Thanksgiving, the Custom is, of those prophane and licentious Persons, who spend this Time in Rioting and Drunkenness, and other sinful Lusts of the Flesh; of all which very briefly.

i. Then, I shall briefly shew, what that Work of the Lord is, which we ought at this time to have a special regard to, and to exercise our Meditations upon. And this has been often already intimated; That Work of

God

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GOD which we are now more especially to consider, is his sending (as at this time) his own Son into the World, for the Redemption of Mankind. And here we should do well to consider more particularly—

(1.) The Greatness and Dignity of the Person that was sent, the only begotten Son of GOD; He who was the Brightness of the Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person; upholding all things by the Word of his Power; that Eternal ALG, of whom St. John speaking, says, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.* The Sense of which is very well express'd in the Creed commonly call'd the Nicene Creed, wherein declaring our Belief of this Article, we are taught to say, *I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all Worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one Substance with the Father, and by whom all things were made.* Such was the Person whose coming into the World we at this time Commemorate.

Heb. i. 3.

(2.) Another thing proper to be now consider'd by us, is the manner of his being sent; That he came not in the Glory of his Father, with the Holy Angels, as he will come hereafter, when he shall return to judge the World; nay, that he came not with so much Glory as the Angels of Light had been used to appear in, when they were sent by GOD on some Message to Men; but he empty'd himself, as the A-

Phil. ii. 7.

Εαυτὸν

postle ἐκένωσεν.

Serm. *postle* expresses it; he laid aside his Majesty

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(not indeed of his Eternal God-head, for that could not be, but) of the Glory which he had with his Father before all Worlds, *and took upon him the form of a Servant, and was made in the likeness of Men.* He whom the Heavens and the Heaven of Heavens could not contain, condescended, by assuming the Human Nature, the Soul and Body of Man to himself, to be (as it were) circumscribed and limited within the same narrow Bounds that we are; *The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us.* And neither was his dwelling among us after the manner of earthly Kings and Princes, with State and Magnificence, in Splendor and Plenty; but he appear'd among us as one of the meanest of Men, as the Son of a Carpenter, of a Man who earn'd his Living by his Labour; with whom also, until the Time that he began to Preach (which was not till he was about Thirty Years Old) he is generally believ'd to have work'd at the same Trade. Neither after that, was his way of Living advanc'd; for he had then no House of his own to lay his Head in, no Estate of his own to live upon; but was for the most part maintain'd by Charity and Contribution. Was ever such Condescension before heard of? Or could it enter into the Heart of Man that such a thing could be? Great indeed, might the *Apostle* well say, *is this Mystery of Godliness, GOD manifested in the Flesh.* But—

(3.) Another thing proper to exercise our Meditation upon at this Season, is the End and Design of this Incarnation of the Son of God; which

which, in general, was the Redemption of Mankind from that wretched, deplorable and desperate State, which by Sin they had plung'd themselves into. *For this purpose, saith the Apostle, the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil, 1 Joh. iii. 8. And God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting Life. For God sent not his Son into the World to condemn the World, but that the World through him might be saved; So we are told by our Saviour himself, John iii. 16, 17. This was the gracious Design of God and our Saviour in this wonderful and mysterious Undertaking; to make Peace for us, and to Preach Peace to us; to reconcile us to God, and to save us from our Sins, and to redeem our Souls from Destruction.*

In order to which, and as a means of accomplishing which gracious Design; (and that's another thing proper to be now consider'd, and meditated upon.)

(4.) He not only took upon him our Nature, in that to converse freely and familiarly with us, and to teach us both by his Precepts and by his Example the way we were to take to be happy; but in this Nature united to the Divinity, he pay'd the Price of our Redemption, he gave his Life a Ransom for all: For in him (as the Apostle says) we have Redemption through his Blood, even the Forgiveness of Sins. And this indeed seems to have been the main Design of his coming; the chief Reason for which it was necessary that he should become Man. For the same Precepts and Rules of Holy Living might have been given by an An-

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gel, or even by a mere Man inspired by GOD, and furnish'd with Power sufficient to prove his Divine Mission, beyond all Contradiction; and the same excellent Example which he gave, was not, I suppose, impossible to have been given by another Man, assisted and strengthen'd unto all good by the powerful Operation of the Holy Ghost: But to redeem lost Mankind, to satisfy the Justice of GOD, to make Peace between GOD and Men; that was what could not be done either by Angels or Men; that was what none could do but the Son of GOD; none but *He* could Pay the Price of so large a Purchase, for no Creature's suffering could have been equivalent to the Destruction of the whole Race of Mankind, which was thereby to be bought of. For this purpose therefore the Son of GOD assum'd our Nature, that, an inestimable Value being added to his Suffering as a Man by the Union of the Divine Nature with the Human, he might by *one Oblation of himself once offered, make a full, perfect, and sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation and Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World.* This was what he came to do; this was what by his Incarnation, *i. e.* by his being manifested in the Flesh, he was capacitated to do; this was what he actually did do for us: For (as the *Apostle* says) *being found in fashion as a Man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.* And this is that wonderful Work of GOD which we ought, now especially, to regard; this is that Operation of his hands, which the present Festival calls upon us to consider.

Phil. ii. 8.

But

But mere Meditation or Contemplation only is not a sufficient Commemoration of this great Mystery; unless we make it as useful and practical to our selves as we can. This therefore was the next thing I propounded to do, viz.

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2. To shew, what Thoughts and Affections towards GOD the Consideration of these things should work in us, and what Influence it ought to have upon our Lives.

(1.) What Thoughts and Affections of Mind towards GOD the Consideration of these things should work in us.

And the natural return for Love is Love: If therefore GOD so loved the World as to give his only begotten Son, to take upon him the Human Nature, in that to pass a wretched and painful Life, and to die an accursed Death for their Redemption, how can we chuse but love him again, and devout our selves, Souls and Bodies intirely to his faithful Service? For *this* (as the *Apostle* says) *is the Love of God, that we keep his Commandments*; we can testify and make Proof of our Love to GOD, no other way. This therefore—

1 Joh. v. 3.

(2.) Is the Influence which the Consideration of that great Mystery of Godliness, which we now Commemorate, should have upon our Lives; we shou'd look upon our selves as the Redeemed of the Lord, and not Live any longer to our selves, but unto him that died for us; being *bought with a Price*, and that *not with corruptible things as Silver and Gold*, but *with the precious Blood of the Son of God*, made Man, we should assert our Freedom from the Slavery of Sin and the Devil, and glorifie
GOD,

1 Cor. vi. 20.

1 Pet. i. 18.

Serm. GOD, both in our Body and in our Spirit,
XIII. which are his.

And this leads me to the Third and last thing which I propounded to do, and where-with I design to put an end to this Discourse, viz.

3. To shew how very unsuitable to the occasion of our present Joy and Thanksgiving, the Custom is of those prophane and licentious Persons, who spend this Time in Rioting and Drunkenness, and other sinful Lusts of the Flesh. For the Mystery we now Commemorate is the Birth of the Son of GOD, *who was manifested for this purpose, that he might destroy the Works of the Devil*, Can any thing then be more absurd, than that we should spend the time of this holy Festival in the Practice of those wicked Works which he came to destroy? The Blessing we now pretend to thank GOD for, is our Redemption from the Power of Sin, and the Dominion of Darknes: Can any thing be more contradictory to this Pretence, than now at this very time to sell our selves again to that Slavery from which we seem to rejoice that we were redeem'd? *He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purifie unto himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works*: Is it not then a very unsuitable way of Commemorating this Benefit, that Iniquity should abound now, rather more than at other times? And that our Love to GOD, and Zeal for his Service, should now be more cold, when it ought to be most flaming and operative? Is it not very absurd, that at this very Season set a-part on purpose to Commemorate our Lord's Birth, and in the doing of which we pretend to

1 Joh. iii. 8.

Tit. ii. 14.

to be at this time employ'd, we should so far forget, or so little consider, what was the Design of his Coming, as to live and act in the greatest possible Contradiction thereto; not only making this Festival an Occasion and Opportunity, but seeming likewise to think it an Excuse or Justification of our allowing our selves in such Irregularities and Extravagances of Life and Behaviour, as we our selves should be ashamed of at any other time?

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That this is the manner of a great many People's keeping *Christmas*, I'm sure I shall not need to tell you; But I hope better things of you, and things that accompany Salvation, I hope you do, and I pray GOD we all of us may, so regard the *Work of the Lord*, so seriously consider and reflect upon the Design of our *Saviour's* first coming, as to keep this Feast in remembrance thereof in a manner agreeable to the occasion of it, and likewise to order our whole Lives conformably thereunto, that so at his second coming to judge the World, we may be found an acceptable People in his sight, through the same our Lord *Jesus Christ*, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory, now and for ever.

Amen.

The

to be at this time employed, we should to the
forget, or to this consider, what was the Oc-
casion of his coming, as to live and sit in the
great possible Contradiction thereto; not on-
ly making this Festival an Occasion and Op-
portunity, but seeming likewise to think it an
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to the occasion of it, and likewise to order our
whole Lives conformably thereto, that when
his second coming to judge the World, we
may be found an acceptable People in his sight,
through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, to
whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost,
be all Honour and Glory, now and for ever,
Amen.

The

The Subjects Duty.

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A
S E R M O N,

Preach'd at *St. Dunstan's in the West, London*, March 8th 1704.

Being the Day of Her MAJESTY'S
Happy Accession to the Throne.

PROV. XXIV. 21.

*My Son, Fear thou the Lord and the King;
and meddle not with them that are given
to Change.*

I Know not how to begin a Discourse upon this Subject better, than in those Words wherewith the Judicious Mr. *Hooker* begins his Learned Discourse of the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Policy*: "He (*says he*) that goes about to perswade a Multitude that they are not so well govern'd as they ought to be, shall never want attentive and favourable Hearers; because they know the manifold Defects whereunto every Kind of Regiment is subject, but the secret Lets and Difficulties, which in Publick Proceedings are innumerable

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“numerable and inevitable, they have not
 “ordinarily the Judgment to consider. And
 “because such as openly reprove supposed
 “Disorders of State, are taken for principal
 “Friends to the common Benefit of all, and for
 “Men that carry singular Freedom of Mind;
 “under this fair and plausible Colour, what-
 “soever they utter passes for good and cur-
 “rent; that which is wanting in the Weight
 “of their Speech being supply’d by the Apt-
 “ness of Mens Minds to accept and believe it.
 “Whereas, on the other side, If we maintain
 “things that are establish’d, we have not on-
 “ly to strive with a Number of heavy Preju-
 “dices deeply rooted in the Hearts of Men,
 “who think that herein we serve the Time,
 “and speak in Favour of the present State,
 “because thereby we either hold or seek Pre-
 “ferment; but also to bear such Exceptions
 “as Minds so averted before-hand usually take
 “against that which they are loth should be
 “pour’d into them.

But what would not be so well taken from
 me, will, I hope, be better taken when coming
 out of the Mouth of a very Wise Man; and
 such an one, you will surely all acknowledge
Solomon to have been. And *He* it was, (’twas
 he who excell’d in Wisdom all that were be-
 fore him, and all that have liv’d since;) or
 rather, it was *Wisdom* it self speaking by his
 Mouth, which has given this Advice in the
 Text, which I would now persuade you to
 follow: *My Son, fear thou the Lord and the
 King, and meddle not with them that are given
 to Change.*

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Concerning which it may be first observ'd in general, that it is given here as a *Father's* Advice to his *Son*; *My Son, fear thou the Lord and the King*; and from hence we may reasonably conclude that it is very good Advice, and that to follow it will be very much for our own Profit and Advantage; For that's the only End that a Father has in the Counsel and Instruction that he gives his Son; he never means any thing by it but his Son's Good; he never advises his Son to any thing but what he thinks it will be for his Interest to do: And whenever he ushers in any Advice in such Manner as this here is introduc'd, with a solemn and particular Compellation, serving to excite and fix the Attention to what follows; *My Son, do this*; or, *My Son, do that*; it is very reasonable to suppose, that he judges the Advice which he is then about to give to be matter of the greatest Usefulness and Importance; 'tis a sign that 'tis what he would have his Son take a special Regard to, and be very careful to observe. And such is, most manifestly, the Counsel which the Wise Father here gives to his Son; it is concerning Matters of the Highest Importance, and of the nearest Concern to every Man; *My Son; Fear thou the Lord, and the King, and meddle not with them that are given to Change.*

I. For that the first Branch of this Advice is such, will I suppose, be readily granted by all, *My Son, fear thou the Lord*; For the Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom; The Fear of GOD induces and comprehends our whole Duty to him; if we fear GOD as we ought to do, and as a good Son fears his Father, we shall

Serm. shall readily obey him in every Command that
 XIV. he lays upon us. Nay, this comprehends all
 our Duty not only to GOD, but to Men too,
 to whom we are to perform all the Offices of
 our Relation to them for GOD's sake, and
 out of a Principle of Conscience and Obedience
 to GOD. Of this *Fear of GOD* then we may
 say, as our *Saviour* does of the *Love of GOD*,
 (and we may truly say it, for indeed the Love
 of GOD and the Fear of GOD are in Sub-
 stance the same) that it is *the first and great*
Commandment; which if we are careful to
 keep according to its true and comprehensive
 Meaning, we shall be deficient in no Part of
 Duty.

II. But the Second Branch of the Wise Fa-
 ther's advice to his Son is also, next to the
 former, of the highest Importance and of the
 nearest Concern, *Fear the King*; *My Son, fear*
thou the Lord and the King: By which is meant,
 that our next Care to that of keeping a good
 Conscience towards GOD, should be that of
 behaving our selves orderly and regularly in
 that Station which GOD, has plac'd us in of
 Subordination and Subjection to those Men that
 are set over us by GOD with a Power to or-
 der and enact such Constitutions (only not
 contrary to the Divine Laws) as are necessary
 to conserve Justice and Peace in that Society
 over which they preside: *Fear the King*, that is,
 "Obey him, keep his Laws, and behave thy
 "self in all things as a dutiful Subject towards
 "him; Or if thou canst not with a good Con-
 "science obey his Commands, yet do not dare
 "to resist his Authority. If what he commands
 "be lawful, do readily as thou art commanded:
 "Or

“ Or if it be not lawful, (which may some-
 “ times be; for the Laws of Men are not al-
 “ ways agreeable to the Laws of GOD) yet
 “ even in that Case thou art not discharged
 “ from thy Subjection to him, for when thou
 “ canst not obey, thou must submit; and that
 “ not only because thou canst not help it, but
 “ altho’ thou couldst; if thou canst not do as he
 “ bids thee, thou must take patiently the Pu-
 “ nishment that is impos’d upon thee for thy
 “ Disobedience.

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This is the Duty of Subjects to their Gover-
 nors, as it is briefly taught in the Text, *Fear*
the King: and more largely in other Places of
 Holy Scripture; as in *Eccles. viii. 2. I counsel*
thee to keep the Kings Commandment, and that in
regard of the Oath of GOD: in *Rom. xiii. Let*
every Soul be subject unto the Higher Powers; For
there is no Power but of GOD; the Powers that
be are ordained of GOD. Whosoever therefore re-
sisteth the Power, resisteth the Ordinance of GOD,
and they that resist shall receive to themselves Dam-
nation—Wherefore ye must needs be subject not
 only for Wrath, but also for Conscience sake; and
 in *1 Pet. ii. 13. Submit your selves to every Ordi-*
nance of Man, for the Lord's sake; whether it be
to the King as Supreme, or unto Governors as un-
to them that are sent by him, for the Punishment
of Evil-Doers, and for the Praise of them that do
well. For so is the Will of GOD, that with well-
doing ye may put to Silence the Ignorance of fool-
ish Men. As free, and not using your Liberty for
a Cloke of Maliciousness, but as the Servants of
Christ. Honour all Men; Love the Brotherhood;
Fear GOD, Honour the King.

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 This, I say, is the Duty, (as it is plainly taught in Scripture) of Subjects to their Governors; that is, to them who have the Supreme Authority of the Nation to which they belong, by whatsoever Name or Title they are call'd; that is to the *Legislative Power* in what Hands soever it is lodg'd by the particular Constitution of the Place. For there may be, and in some Countries there is, the Name and Title of a King without the Power; and there may be, and in some other Countries there is, the Power of a King without the Name; Nay, there is indeed in every Country, State, Kingdom or Common-wealth, the Kingly or the Supreme Power lodg'd somewhere or other, either in One, in Few or in more Hands: This Power, I say, there is in the Government of every Nation, as well in a Democracy, or Aristocracy, as in a Monarchy; and as well in the most Limited Monarchy, as in that which is the most Arbitrary and Absolute; and I say, 'tis this *Kingly Power*, where-ever 'tis by the Constitution seated or lodg'd, that is to be fear'd and obey'd: For the Scripture only declares in general the Duties of Governors to their Subjects, and of Subjects to their Governours; but it does not expressly define or prescribe any one Form or Manner of Government as necessary to be set up and preserved in all Nations; but leaves every Country to it self to establish that Form of Government which is most suitable to its own particular Temper and Genius. Only when any sort of Government is set up and establish'd (there being, as was said before, in every Form of Government a Kingly, that is, an Absolute and Arbitrary Power lodg'd somewhere

where or other, either in one Hand or in more) **Serm.**
 it then commands Obedience, and forbids Re- **XIV.**
 sistance to this Sovereign Power; It commands Submission to this Power, as to the *Ordinance of*
GOD, (*for there is no Power but of GOD, and*
the Powers that be are ordained of GOD;) and
 and it declares, that they that being plac'd in
 Subjection to this Power do make Resistance
 to it, *resist the Ordinance of GOD, and shall re-*
ceive to themselves Damnation.

And thus much of the Second Branch of the
 Wise Man's Advice to his Son; *My Son, Fear*
thou the King. But before I come to speak of
 the Third, *Meddle not with them that are given*
to Charge, I think it may be of good Use to
 make some brief Observations upon the Two
 former Branches of it, consider'd as given to-
 gether in the same Breath, as connected with
 each other, as depending one upon the other;
Fear the Lord, and the King. And,

1. From the Order in which these Two
 Branches of his Advice are plac'd, *Fear thou*
the Lord, and the King, it may be observ'd, that
GOD is to be first fear'd, then the King;
 or that **GOD** is to be more fear'd than the
 King; that no Power upon Earth has Autho-
 rity to make Laws contrary to the Divine
 Laws, or to discharge its Subjects from those
 Obligations which were before laid upon
 them by the Law of **GOD**. This is so evident,
 That the *Apostles* when they had been charg'd
 by the *Jewish Sanhedrim* to forbear Preaching
 in the Name of *Jesus*, *Acts* iv. 16, 17. to do
 which they had before receiv'd a Command
 from **GOD**, boldly appeal'd even to the Coun-
 cil themselves, to judge, and declare whether

Serm. in such Case their Order ought to be obey'd;
 XIV. as knowing that they themselves would not dare to affirm that a Human Law could evacuate or set by a contrary Law of GOD.
Ver. 19 Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the Sight of GOD, to hearken unto you more than unto GOD, judge ye.

2. From the Advice of Fearing and Obeying the King, being *immediately subjoin'd* to that of Fearing GOD, and both being given as it were in the same Breath, *Fear the Lord, and the King*, it may be observ'd, that our highest Obligation next to that of Obeying GOD, is to obey and submit our selves to those whom GOD has made his Deputies and Viceröys here upon Earth: And this is the Relation wherein Earthly Kings, that is, the Sovereign Powers of every State or Nation, do stand to GOD; *By me Kings reign—By me Princes rule*, so we are told, *Prov. viii. 15, 16. The most High ruleth in the Kingdom of Men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will*; so we are taught, *Dan. iv. 32. And there is no Power but of GOD; the Powers that be are ordained of GOD*; says the *Apostle*; And again, *He is the Minister of GOD to thee for Good*; *He is the Minister of GOD, an Avenger to execute Wrath upon him that doth Evil*. And from this Relation wherein the Supreme Powers of every Nation do stand to GOD, they themselves are sometimes in Scripture called *Gods*, they are said to *judge not for Man but for the Lord*, and the Judgment that they give is called, *GOD's Judgment*. Having therefore a sort of God-like Power communicated to them by GOD, 'tis but fit that next to GOD they

Rom. xiii. 1.

Ver. 4.

Ex. xxii. 28.
 2 Chr. xix. 6.
 Deut. i. 17.

they should be had in the highest Honour by their Subjects, and that after the Care of Religion, the Subjects next chiefest Care should be to behave themselves dutifully to those whom God has set over them, in order to preserve Peace and Justice in the World, *Fear the Lord, and the King.* Serm. XIV.

3. From the *Connexion* that is made in the Text between these Two Duties, the Fear of God and of the *King*, it may be further observ'd, and most certainly inferr'd, that they are not Repugnant and Contradictory, nay, that they are very Consistent with each other. So that a good Man may both fear God and the King too; and there can never be a Necessity lying upon any Man from his Obligation to discharge one of these Duties, to neglect to transgress the other. It is not therefore true Loyalty, but Cowardice or Worldly-mindedness that ever makes Men give up their Religion and Conscience to the Humour of their Prince, and yield a blind Obedience without Reserve or Exception to all his Commands, how unjust, how unreasonable, how ungodly and irreligious soever they be; for such Submission as this to the Will of Princes, is a manifest Contradiction to the first Branch of the Advice here given, *Fear the Lord*: And on the other side, It is not true Religion and a well-inform'd Conscience, but an ignorant and misguided Zeal, or a Form of Godliness without the Power of it, that ever turns Religion into Rebellion, and Faith into Faction; that ever arms Subjects against their Sovereign, that ever deposes Princes, and unsettles the State, and disturbs the Peace and Order of the

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World; This is as manifest a Contradiction to the Second Branch of the Advice, *fear the King; My Son, fear thou the Lord, and the King*; we may certainly do both these, or else both would not have been commanded. But it is a thing too evident to be deny'd, that the Laws of Princes are not always conformable to the Laws of GOD, and when they are not so, it is impossible that they should be both comply'd with by an Active Obedience; For, as our *Saviour* says, *No man can serve two Masters*; to be sure, not Two whose Commands are Repugnant and Contradictory: In this Case therefore Subjects are not in Duty bound to do as they are commanded by their Governours; and yet neither in this Case does the Precept enjoining them *to fear the King* become void and of none effect, only it then ties them to an Obedience of another Sort, that is, to a Submission of themselves to suffer the Punishment of that Law which they could not with a good Conscience yield an active Obedience to: still the King, that is, the Sovereign Civil Power must be feared; and he is fear'd and obey'd as much in this Case he ought to be, when his Authority is not resisted, when *out of Conscience towards GOD we endure Grief, suffering wrongfully*; for (as the *Apostle* says) *herewith are we called*; Because *Christ* also suffer'd for us, leaving us an Example that we should follow his Steps; and so is the Will of GOD, that with well-doing we should put to Silence the Ignorance of foolish men. But,

1 Pet. ii. 21.

— 15.

4. Lastly, What may be further observ'd and argu'd from the Connexion that seems to be

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be here made between these two first Branches of the Wise Man's Advice, *My Son, Fear thou the Lord, and the King*, is this; That Religion towards GOD is the best and surest Ground of Loyalty and due Obedience to the King; He that fears GOD as he ought to do, will also fear the King for GOD's sake, and because GOD has commanded him so to do; his Loyalty will be a Part of his Religion; and he, for the same Reason for which he will be ever at all Loyal, will be always so; But he that honours his Prince upon any other Principle, will honour him no more, nor no longer than while he finds his own Interest in it; He flatters his King, but he is no true Friend to him; He serves him only for Reward, and will be as ready to betray as to serve him when he can get more by that than by this.

III. And now I come to speak of the Third Branch of the Wise Fathers Advice to his Son; *Meddle not with them that are given to Change*. In Order to the Explication of which it may be needful to enquire. 1. Who they are that may be said to be given to Change; and 2. What it is to meddle with such Men.

But before I do these things, I think it will be expedient, (both to prevent any Misunderstanding of what shall be said, and likewise for some other good Purposes) to take particular Notice to whom it is that the Advice in the Text, *not to meddle with such as are given to Changes*, is directed; *My Son, meddle not with them that are given to Change*.

And here it may be consider'd, that the Giver of this Advice was Solomon, who was

Serm. himself King over *Israel*, who had himself the
 XIV. whole Kingly Power, in whom solely, and
 without any Partner or Sharer in the Govern-
 ment, the whole Sovereign Authority of the
 Nation, both Legislative and Executive, was
 lodg'd; For this you know was the Consti-
 tution among the *Jews*, the whole Sovereign-
 ty was in the King alone; Counsellors he
 might have, but they had no Share with him
 in the Legislature, for it was at his free E-
 lection to take their Advice or not; and
 what he enacted, whether with their Advice
 or without it, was good Law. Such a King,
 I say, was *Solomon*, who gives this Counsel,
 not to meddle with such as are given in
 Change; and it is evident that he gives the
 Advice to *another*, not to himself; he gives
 it to *his Son*, who was a Subject, not to him-
 self, who was an Absolute and a Sovereign
 Prince. He gives it to the *same Person* whom,
 in the Clause just before, he had commanded
 to *fear the King*, therefore to be sure, not to
 the King himself, but to such only as were
 in Subjection to him.

And what I argue and infer from hence is
 this, that the Advice in the Text, *not to be
 given to Change, nor to meddle with such as
 are given to Change*, tho' as Matter of *Pru-
 dence* it may concern all, King as well as
 People, the Supreme Governors of a Nation,
 as well as those who are under Government;
 yet as a Matter of *Duty* it can and must be-
 long only to such as are in Subjection, that
 is, only to the People and Subjects. For
 tho', as the *Apostle* says, *there is no Power but
 of GOD, and the Powers that be are ordained*

of GOD, that is, tho' the Power which they have is a Portion of the Divine Power; yet there is no one particular Form of Government that can truly be said to be of Divine Institution and Appointment; and if there be not, then there is no one Form of Government but what may be chang'd and alter'd, provided that they who make the Change have sufficient Authority to make it; and sufficient Authority He or they must be allow'd to have to make any such Change or Alteration in the Form and Manner of the Government, who has, or who have for the Time being, the Supreme and Sovereign Authority in that Nation wherein such Change is made; For the Sovereign Authority of every State or Nation (whether it be lodg'd in One Hand, or in many) is, and in the Nature of the thing must needs be, Absolute, Unlimited, and Uncontroulable: That which is the Highest Authority in any Nation, may do what it pleases; and because it is the Highest upon Earth, can be accountable to none but GOD for what it does. This Sovereign Authority therefore, I say, may make what Changes and Alterations it self pleases in the Frame and Constitution of the Government; and whatever Changes it makes, they are Lawful and Valid, provided that no Natural Right of any other Man be thereby invaded and violated.

Supposing therefore Government to be founded originally in the Paternal or Patriarchal Right, yet if that single Person in whom the whole Sovereign Power was lodg'd by this Right, either to give Ease to himself,
finding

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finding the Weight of the Government too heavy for himself to bear alone; or to give Ease to his People, finding that it is with great Unwillingness and Reluctance that they submit to be govern'd by his Sole Will and Pleasure, or for any good Cause and Consideration him thereunto moving, shall think fit to call to his Assistance any of his Subjects, constituting them his standing Council, and declaring and enacting that he will do nothing without them, and that no Act or Law of his, done without their Approbation, shall be of Force and Binding to his Subjects: From this time forward the whole Frame and Constitution of the Government will be clearly alter'd, and that which was before an Absolute, will thenceforward become a Limited or Mix'd Monarchy; and this Change in the Constitution, being made by him that had the Sovereign Power, will be Good and Valid; neither will it be Lawful for him to re-assume again, without Consent of this Council, that Portion of the Sovereignty which he had before freely parted with and transferr'd to them.

And if, the Government being thus settl'd, the Sovereign Power for the Time being, that is, this King with his Council shall *both* agree to make a further Alteration in it; if they shall *both* agree to lay aside their own Superiority, and to devolve the Sovereign Power that is then lodg'd in them on the People; and shall enact and declare, that no Law shall be Good and Valid, but what the Majority of the Populace shall agree to; by this, that Government, which was at first
an

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an Absolute, and afterwards a Limited Monarchy, will become a perfect Commonwealth; and after that they shall have thus transferr'd the whole Government upon the People, and freely parted with their own Right to it, it will be unjust in them to re-assume this Power, any otherwise than by the Free Gift of the People on whom they had transferr'd it.

And, on the other side, the Case will be exactly the same, if it be supposed, that the Right of Government was originally in the People; for still it will be capable of the like Changes and Alterations; the Sovereignty (where-ever it is lodg'd) may be alienated and parted with to others. If therefore the Sovereignty being (as is now suppos'd) lodg'd in the People, they, finding the Inconveniencies of Numerous Popular Assemblies, shall think fit to transfer this Power to some few Persons delegated and chosen by themselves; from this time forward these Delegates or Representatives of the People are the Supreme Power, and the People become meer Subjects to them, and may not forcibly take again to themselves that Power which they have freely parted with. And again, If this Representative Body of the People, in which the Sovereignty will be then lodg'd, finding the Inconveniencies of this sort of Government, by reason of the Factions they are subject to, shall think fit to make Choice of one single Person to preside and moderate in their Assembly, with a Negative or a Casting Vote, or with what further Degree of Power they shall think convenient

to

Serm. to bestow upon him: This is a farther Al-
 XIV. teration of the Manner of the Government;
 because, what Power they give him they
 give from themselves, and may not challenge
 or claim it back again as their due, after
 they have freely parted with it: And when
 they do choose such a Governor, they may
 choose him upon what Conditions, they may
 constitute him with what Limitations they
 please; they may, if they will, appoint him
 only for a Year, or other Limited Time;
 or they may, if they think that better, ap-
 point him for Life; or they may, if they
 are so minded, order that the Power which
 they give him shall descend to his Heirs af-
 ter him; and they may call him King, or
 Duke, or Stadtholder, or give him whatever
 other Title they shall think better. And if
 after this, finding Inconveniencies in this mix'd
 sort of Government, they in whom the Su-
 preme Power is then lodg'd, that is, this
 King, or Duke (or whatever else he is call'd)
 with his Council or Parliament, shall both a-
 gree together to make a further Alteration
 in the Government: If they shall agree to
 transfer the whole Sovereignty to him, and
 he shall consent to accept of it; and they do
 both by a solemn Act Decree and Ordain this
 Establishment; that Government which was
 at first a Democracy, and after that a Mix'd
 Monarchy, will thenceforward become an
 Absolute Monarchy; and any of all these
 Changes or Alterations in the Form or Man-
 ner of Government, being made by such as
 for the Time being were lawfully possess'd
 of the Sovereign Power, will be regularly
 made;

made; and being once made, will be Valid and Binding: And in whatsoever Hands the Sovereignty shall be thus regularly plac'd, it can't be regularly taken from thence again but by his or their own Cession or Consent.

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Thus, I think it is evident that no Change or Alteration of the Form of Government from one sort to another, is in it self unlawful to be made, provided it be made by those who have Power to make it; that is, by the Government it self, I mean, by him or them who for the Time being have the Sovereign Power in their Hands; because (as I said before) there is no one Sort or Form of Government that can truly be said to be of Divine Institution. The Power of Government indeed, that is, the Power and Authority that Governors have, is from GOD, *By me*, says he, *Kings Reign, and Princes decree Justice*; and, *there is no Power but of GOD*, says the *Apostle*; but the Designation and Appointment of particular Persons to the Administration of the Government, this is Humane; and the Distribution of the Power of Government into One, or into more Hands, this is likewise Human: This is the Ordinance of Man only, and whatever is ordained by Man, is in its own Nature Alterable, and may at any Time be altered by the same Power that ordain'd it. I do not say, it may be alter'd by the same Persons that ordain'd it, (for 'tis possible that by such Ordinance the Power may be transferr'd from One Person to another, and what Power any Man has once given away from himself to another, he can't reclaim as in Right; he may receive it again as a Gift from him to whom he gave it, but he can't Challenge

Prov. viii. 15.

Rom. xiii. 1.

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Challenge it again as his Due. I say therefore, I do not affirm, that whatever has been ordain'd by Man, may be alter'd by the same Persons that ordain'd it) I only affirm, that it may be altered by the same Power that ordain'd it. I affirm, that the same Humane Power which has settl'd the Sovereignty in One Hand, may distribute it into several Hands; or if it has settl'd it in many Hands, it may take it thence and give it into One Hand; that same Humane Power which has made the Persons of such as have the Administration of the Government Elective, may ordain that they shall be Successive: That same Humane Power that can settle a Crown in Entail, can also cut off the Entail of a Crown; that same Humane Power that can settle the Succession of a Crown unconditionally, may appoint Conditions, without performing which he that is next Heir in Course shall not inherit: And whatever Establishment of the Government the Supreme and Sovereign Power of any Nation makes in One Age, the Supreme and Sovereign Power for the time being of the same Nation, may in the next Age make null and void. For the Supreme Power of every Nation, is, and must needs be in every Age lodg'd somewhere or other, and the Highest Power for the time being, may, for its own Time, make what Laws and Ordinances it self pleases, as to the Settlement and Administration of the Government, which will be good Laws till they are repeal'd. But then the same Sovereign Power which has Authority to make a Law, has, and always must have as much Authority to repeal it; and no One Generation

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tion of Men can ever in such Matters so bind the Hands, and restrain the Power of the Generations to come, but that they in their Time will have the same full Power to order Publick Affairs according to their own Liking, that the present Generation has. There being therefore no meer Humane Constitution but what in its own Nature is alterable (and I now take it for granted, that the particular Form or Manner of any Government is a meer Humane Constitution) it plainly follows, that the Precept in the Text, forbidding *to Change*, or, *to meddle with those that are given to Change*, is not given to the Supreme Legislative Power, which may make what Changes in the Form of Government it thinks reasonable; but only to meer Subjects, whose Duty it is to be quiet, and to submit to the Powers that be; and who will act out of their Sphere, and in a Matter above their Capacity, in Case they shall take upon them to unsettle that Form of Government, whatever it is, that is already establish'd, or to frame and set up a new One.

The Supreme Legislative Power, where-ever lodg'd, is therefore no otherwise concern'd in this Precept, than only as in a Matter of Prudence; and so far indeed they are very nearly concern'd in it; it being rarely that any considerable Change can be made in the Form of a Government that has been long establish'd, and under which the Commonwealth has prosper'd and flourish'd, without more Danger of Hurt than Hope of Good to the Community: An Alteration in the Government being like a Reparation in the Foundation of an House,
which

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which if it be necessary to be made, must be made, and yet unless it be made very cautiously, can't be done without endangering the the Downfal of the whole Fabrick. Whenever therefore the Supreme Power of any Nation undertakes to make any Change in the Establish'd Form of Government, they ought in Prudence to be first very well satisfy'd that such a Change is necessary; and they ought likewise wisely to foresee all the Consequences that may probably follow from such a Change, and to be well assur'd, that there will be more Good than Hurt in it: But when they are well satisfy'd in this, they may then, without any Breach of Duty or Justice, make such Alterations therein as they judge needful; they do no more than they have full Power and Authority to do in making such a Change, and it is the Duty of Subjects to acquiesce in the Wisdom of their Superiors.

And the Reason why I have now mention'd, and insisted so largely upon this Point, is (as I have already hinted) not only in order to give you the true Meaning (as I conceive) of this Precept, *Meddle not with them that are given to Change*; But likewise to give Ease and Satisfaction to the Consciences of Men, as to some Alterations that have been lately made in the Government of our own Nation.

For you all know, (I shall not need to tell you that,) that the Supreme Legislative Power of this Nation, is by the Constitution lodg'd in the King or Queen for the time being, and in the Two Houses of Parliament; that what is Enacted by their joint Authority, is a Law
of

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of the Land to which they do ~~not~~ all Three give their Consent: And in this Essential and most Fundamental Constitution of the Government, there has not (GOD be thanked) been made, and I hope never will be made, any Change or Alteration; But as to the Succession to the Crown, there have been of late made some very considerable Limitations; and well had it been for the Nation if the same had been made an Hundred Years sooner. For whereas formerly the Crown descended of Course to the next in Blood, without any Exception, Condition, or Limitation; it is now limited to descend to the next Heir that is a Protestant; and thereby not only One Person in particular who is of uncertain Birth, but likewise several others of the Popish Religion, of whose Legitimacy there has been no Doubt, are debarr'd and excluded from the Succession; and it is also declar'd to be a Forfeiture of the Crown, for any one that is possess'd of it to be reconcil'd to the Church of *Rome*, or to Marry with a Papist.

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xii. W. III.

Now this, you know, is what some amongst us are stumbled at: First, such a Change, they think, ought not to have been made; and, secondly, now that it is made, they think, it is Null and Invalid.

But the first of these is a Point which I am at present no Ways concern'd to enquire into; neither, I think, are you: They that have Power to make such a Change are the best, they are indeed the only proper Judges of the Prudence, the Reason, the Necessity of it.

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in order to give Ease and Satisfaction to the Consciences of those Subjects who have any Doubts or Scruples about the Matter, is only to shew, that they who made this Alteration as to the Succession of the Crown, had Power sufficient to make it, and consequently that now it is made it is Valid and Binding; so that all those who are oblig'd by Law to declare (as all Persons in Place and Office now are) that they do not believe, that any Person hath now any Right or Title to the Crown of this Realm, otherwise than according to this Settlement of the Succession, may safely and with a good Conscience make this Declaration.

For this I take to be an undoubted Truth, that no Man has a *natural Right* to any thing in this World more than to the Necessaries of Life: Whatever Right any Man has to Estate or Dignity, or Dominion, except only over the Fruit of his own Body, is meerly Humane; that is, 'tis a Right that is given by the Law of the Land or the Constitution of the Realm; thus, That the Eldest Son should inherit all his Father's real Estate, is no Law of Nature, for by Nature all his Children have Right alike; and even here with us, where this is the general Law of Inheritance, yet there are real Estates in some Places, that descend after another manner, all to the Younger Son, or to all Sons alike; and in some other Countries perhaps, the whole real Estate of every Person, after the Decease of the Possessor, may revert to the Crown from which it was granted, and the Exchequer or Publick Treasury

Treasury may be also the sole Heir to his Personal Estate. And if no Man has a Natural Right to an Estate, much less can he have a Natural Right to Government, I mean, out of his own Family; 'tis the Supreme Power of every Nation that gives this Right to whom it pleases, and in such manner as it pleases; 'tis this Supreme Power of every Nation that establishes in several Nations a different sort of Government, and which in Monarchies makes the Crown of one Nation to be Elective, and of another Successive; and which in Hereditary Monarchies, excludes, in one Country, all the Females and their Issue, and, in another Country admits the next in Blood to Inherit, whether Male or Female, and in the same Proximity of Blood, prefers the Male before the Female. And I never yet heard it offer'd to be prov'd, that any of these Conditions or Limitations of Succession to a Crown, were Breaches of a Law of Nature, or Violations of a Natural Right.

Now therefore if this be true, That no Man has a Natural Right to the Government of a Kingdom, it remains, that the only Right which any Person hath thereto, must be a Legal Right, that is, such a Right as is given him by the Law and Constitution of the Realm; and the Law can give no Right any longer than while it self is in Force; and the same Sovereign Legislative Power that can make a Law, has as much Authority to repeal a Law; and the Law which gives any such Right, being by sufficient Authority repealed, the Right which

Serm. was solely founded upon that Law, must
 XIV. needs become Null and Void: For the Right
 having no other Foundation but that Law,
 that Foundation being remov'd by the Repeal
 of the Law, the Right that was built upon
 that and nothing else, must needs fall to the
 Ground.

To me therefore it seems very plain, that
 whatever Right, either that particular Person,
 of the Legitimacy of whose Birth there is so
 much Doubt, or any other Person or Persons
 whatsoever, that are nearer of Kin to the
 Crown than that Family is on which it is
 now Entail'd, had or might be suppos'd to
 have had, in Case there had been no Change
 made in the Laws relating to the Succession,
 it is by the Change that has been now made
 in those Laws clearly cut off and destroy'd;
 so that now we may truly declare, that nei-
 ther he nor they, who by this last Law are
 excluded, have any Right or Title whatsoever
 to the Crown of this Realm: For no Right
 ever had they, or could they have but by
 Law, and the Law has now given this Right
 from them to others; and the Supreme Le-
 gislative Power of the present Time, has cer-
 tainly as much Power and Authority to grant
 this Right of Succession to whom it will, as
 the same Legislative Power of the former
 Times had.

So that I think no Person can now have a-
 ny reasonable Doubt of the Lawfulness of
 making this *Declaration*, which all in Places
 and Offices are Bound to make, unless he
 doubts whether this last Law, so limiting the
 Succession to the Crown, be a Law of the
 Land;

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Land ; that is, whether it was enacted by Supreme Legislative Power of the Nation, viz. the King and the Two Houses of Parliament, in whom, according to our present Constitution, the Supreme Legislative Power is most certainly lodg'd. And to him who has any Doubt in his Mind whether or no this be a Law of the Land, I have little to say but this, that if he himself don't remember the making of the Law, (which I suppose most of us do) he may look into the Statute Book, and see if it be not there Printed with the rest ; or he may, if he has still a Mind to be more certain of it, search the Records, and see if the Original Act be not there entred and kept, as one of the Laws and Statutes of this Realm. Or if this won't satisfie, I leave him to be told by the *Lawyers* (for 'tis not within my Profession to tell him that) that according to the Constitution of our Government, as it now is, and as it has been for several Hundred Years past, the King for the time being in Possession of the Crown, and recogniz'd and acknowledg'd by the States of the Realm, is (without further Enquiry into other Titles) Lawful and Rightful King, at least so far as that an Act of Parliament pass'd by him is a Good and Valid Law : This I suppose the Lawyers will tell him ; this I'm sure they must say, or else they must grant that well nigh half the Statutes, not only of the present, but of former Times, according to which they Plead, and according to which the Civil Rights of the Subjects are judicially determin'd, are not good Laws and Statutes.

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Thus,

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Thus, I think I have made it appear, that this Precept, *Meddle not with them that are given to Change*, does not teach the Duty of Sovereign Powers, who may Lawfully make what Changes and Alterations in the Frame and Constitution of the Government they themselves think fit; but only of Subjects, whose Duty it is to be Quiet and Contented in their Station, and to submit to that Form of Government which is establish'd, believing (as the *Apostle* teaches) that *there is no Power but of GOD*, that *the Powers that be are ordained of GOD*; that *whosoever resisteth the Power resisteth the Ordinance of GOD*, and that *they that resist shall receive to themselves Damnation*.

And now I come to speak very briefly to the Two Points before propos'd to be spoken to, in order to the Explication of the Third and Last Branch of the Wise Man's Advice to his Son, *Meddle not with them that are given to Change*, viz. to enquire 1. Who they are that may be said to be *given to Change*; And, 2. What it is to *meddle with such Men*.

I. Who they are that may be said to be *given to Change*. And,

1. First of all, This they certainly are who are uneasy in that State of Subjection which GOD has plac'd them in, who think themselves better able to govern the Kingdom than those are in whose Hands Providence has deposited this Care; For they who have this Conceit of themselves, and yet according to the present Establishment are never like to be called to the Government, or to any

any Share of it, can't but wish the Destruction of the present Establishment, in Order to make Room for themselves to come in. *O that I were made Judge in the Land, that every Man which hath any Suit or Cause might come unto me, and I would do him Justice;* so said *Abalom*, 2 Sam. xv. 4. He thought the Administration of the Government not so well manag'd by his Father *David*, as it would be by himself; and this fond Self-conceit naturally put him upon endeavouring to Dethrone his Father, and to place himself in his Room.

2. They may be said to be *given to Change*, and do sufficiently shew that they are so, who tho' they do not express such an high Opinion of themselves, yet are ever expressing a very low and mean Opinion of those in whose Hands the Government is plac'd; who make it their Business to pry into, and enquire out all the Oversights or Miscarriages of the present Administration, (and what Government is there, or ever was there so perfect, in which there have not been some Oversights or Miscarriages?) who set themselves to divulge and spread abroad all the ill Things they know or have heard of concerning their Governors; who on all Occasions magnifie every little Failing, aggravate every small Miscarriage, judge of the Prudence of every Undertaking by its Success; and if any Enterprize that is taken in Hand miscarries, will never suffer such Unsuccessfulness to be attributed to Chance, or Providence, or any other Cause, but either to gross Ignorance or Unskilfulness, or wilful Male-

Serm. Administration. For to what Purpose is all
 XIV. such Talk, but only to discontent Mens Minds,
 to render them uneasie in their Station, and
 to dispose them to attempt a Revolution? They who allow themselves to talk at this Rate, have, it may be, too much Wit to venture the Burning of their own Fingers; but if they can influence and perswade others to it, that will answer their End as well. If they can but move others to Mutiny and Sedition, they make no Doubt but they shall afterwards find good Fishing for themselves in the Troubled Waters; and that if they can but influence the Ignorant, and easily Mis-guided Multitude to pull others down, they shall afterwards be able with Ease to set themselves up.

3. They may yet more truly be said to be *given to Change*, at least, they do more plainly shew themselves to be so, who if they can find no Faults in the Administration of Publick Affairs, do without Scruple make them; who set themselves to Forge and Frame any Lyes that may do Hurt concerning the Counsels, the Actions, or the Persons of their Governors; in order to possess Mens Minds with unreasonable Fears and Jealousies, thereby to render the Persons of their Governors Odious, and their Government Weak and Precarious. But

4. They especially are most evidently *given to Change*, or rather they are more than given to it, they are actually attempting it; who in Case of any, whether True or Suppos'd, Disorders of State, go out of their own Way and Sphere to rectifie or redress them;

them; and this they certainly do, who being meer Subjects, do use any other Means to get their Grievances Redress'd, than only Prayers and Tears. What Power they may exert for this Purpose, who have any Portion or Share of the Legislature vested in them, as with us, each House of Parliament manifestly has, I will not take upon me to say; they know best the Extent of their own Power, and upon what Occasions, and in what Degrees it is necessary or proper to exert it, in order to preserve the Balance that is establish'd by the Constitution: But it is manifestly irregular for meer Private Subjects, to gather together in Tumults, or to break out into open Rebellion against the Sovereign Power, on Pretence of doing themselves Right: This is a considerable Advance towards a Change, and in Probability (how Oppressive soever the present Government is) towards a Change much for the worse: The Miseries of Anarchy, Confusion, and Civil War, being commonly much greater, and more universally felt, than the Miseries occasion'd by the Tyranny and Oppression of any Government:

These are such as may be said to be *given to Change.* And,

2. They who may truly be said to *meddle with those that are given to Change*, are such who give them any manner of Encouragement in this their Irregular Proceeding; that is, who gladly give ear to their Uncharitable, Malicious and False Reports; who love to hear the Government blacken'd and defam'd; who are well-pleas'd that the Mischief

is

Serm. is done by other Hands, which they themselves, for their own Safety sake, were afraid to undertake: They do give them still

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greater Encouragement, who suffer themselves to be cheated into an Opinion of such Mens Honesty, by the loud Pretences that they make of Zeal for Liberty and Religion; Indeed, were it not for such abused and misled People as these, no Sedition would ever be very formidable. But they, above all, may most truly be said to *meddle with such as are given to Change*, who join and take part with such whose open Design it is, (no Matter upon what specious Pretences) to dissolve the present Government, and to set up a New One: They who do thus meddle with such as are *given to Change*, are no whit better than those are whom they join with, and may justly expect the same Reward, even that mention'd in the Verse following the Text, *Their Calamity shall rise suddenly, and who knoweth the Ruin of them both.*

I shall observe but one thing more concerning the Precept in the Text, I mean, the Two last Branches of it; *Fear the King*, and, *Meddle not with them that are given to Change*: and this I shall do, only in order to deduce one very Just, and I think also Useful, and very Seasonable Inference from the whole, and so conclude.

It is this; That these Two Branches of the Wise Man's Advice, as they are given to none but Subjects, (for the King himself is not to fear the King, and they who have the Power of the Government may lawfully,

as

as I have shewed already, not only attempt, but make Changes in it, if they see Cause,) so they are plainly given to *all* that are meer Subjects; and that whether the King be so good a King as they could wish for or no, or whether the Government be as gentle and perfect as it might be or not; For the Text takes no Notice of the Personal Qualifications of the King, neither of his Wisdom and Vertue, nor of his Want of them, nor yet of the Excellencies or Imperfections of the Government; but it speaks in general of any King for the time being, when it commands Subjects to fear their King; and it speaks of any sort or kind of Government, that for the time being is regularly Establish'd, when it forbids the Subjects to meditate or endeavour the making Alteration in it.

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Now if it be the Duty of Subjects to fear their King, even tho' he be not so good an One as they could wish; and not to project or undertake to make any Change in the Government, even tho' it be for the better (for that to be sure is what all such Medlers do think, at least, 'tis what they will not fail to give out); If it be the Duty of meer Subjects to take these Things as they find them, because none can regularly go about even to reform the Government but the Sovereign Power, or at least only such Persons as have some Share of the Sovereignty lodg'd in them; and then only according to that Measure thereof which they have, and within those Bounds which are set to their Power by the Constitution; much rather are all
meer

Serm. meer Subjects bound, both in Duty and also in
 XIV. Interest, to Fear and Obey a Good and Gracious
 Sovereign, and not only to be Quiet and Contented, but very Thankful too, if they have the Happiness to be under a Government that can't be mended, a Government that seems as Perfect as a Humane Constitution can be. And this (God be thanked) is, in both these Respects, manifestly our Case at this present time. For,

1. As to the Constitution of our Government, that is certainly the best in the whole World: The *Utopians* would be hard put to it so much as to imagine a better: 'Tis a Constitution wherein the Power of the Sword is fully lodg'd in the Sovereign, and yet with all the Security that can be that it shall never be Mis-us'd; whereby the Rights and Prerogatives of the Crown, and the Liberties and Properties of the People are with equal Care preserv'd; wherein the Sovereign has all the Power that can be to do Good, and none to do Hurt. In a word, it is a Constitution, during the Continuance whereof, the People can never be Enslav'd and Ruin'd but with their own Consent, by Representatives of their own Choosing; and it may be reasonably hop'd, that they will never be so foolish as to give their Consent to their own Destruction. And yet,

2. If this might be suppos'd, we should nevertheless be safe from present Ruin, having (God be thanked, and on this Day of Her Majesty's Happy Accession to the Crown we have, more especially, Reason to be thankful for it; having, I say) such a Sovereign now on the Throne, as might safely be Trusted with the

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the highest and most unlimited Prerogatives, because we are morally assur'd, she never would use them but to promote the Good and Welfare of her People. A *QUEEN* that is intirely in the Interests of her People, and can't reasonably be so much as suspected to have any Interest of her own distinct from theirs. A *QUEEN*, that has been remarkably careful about Matters of Piety, and express'd the most earnest Desire to transmit to Posterity the same excellent Religion that is Establish'd among us. A *QUEEN*, that is so far from endeavoring to Enrich her Self by the Spoil of her Subjects, that She has not only been, beyond Example, Provident in the Management of the Publick Treasure, but also as Frugal in Her own Expences as with Decency, and with the Preservation of the Honour of the Crown she could be, with this only Design, that She might spare as much as was possible out of her own Revenue towards the Publick Use, that so her Subjects might be the less burthen'd.

But it would be endless to say all that might be said upon this Subject, I'm sure without Flattery, and I verily believe, without the Suspicion of it; and I am sensible I have already kept you too long.

I shall therefore only add this one thing more, *viz.* That being so extremely Happy as we now are, both in the Constitution of the Government and in the Administration of it; we have nothing else to do, but to be thankful to GOD for these Blessings, to endeavour to walk worthy of them, and to pray for their Continuance: And in order to this last, to put
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up our hearty Supplications to the Throne of Grace, that GOD would be pleas'd to Grant the *QUEEN* a Long Life, and to Direct her Counsels, and Prosper her Endeavours for the Publick Good; And that when He shall be pleased to Translate Her hence to a better Kingdom (which for our own sakes we can't but wish may not be in our Time) He will then bless our Posterity with a Succession of such Princes (and, if it may be, from her own Body) who like Her may Govern Wisely and Live Vertuously, and by the Authority both of their Laws and of their Godly Example, may perfect that Reformation which (such is our present Corruption both as to Principles and Morals) it is to be fear'd her Reign alone (tho' we wish it may be a very long one) will not be sufficient to accomplish.

And may GOD of his Infinite Mercy vouchsafe to hear and grant these our Petitions, for the Sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom, &c.

28 JY 58

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